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THE PORTRAIT

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BY

FORD MADOX HUEFFER

AUTHOR OF "AN ENGLISH GIRL," ETC.

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THE PORTRAIT

PART I

I

“**B**UT the white satin, sir . . .” Mr. Boodle said from the floor where he knelt, rolling up his stuffs. “You have to remember my credit, sir, if not your own, and to wear white satin at your entry upon the Town! . . .”

In a blue silk dressing-gown, with a white cloth knotted in turban fashion about his shaven head, Mr. Bettesworth held before his face the book of the opera *The Island Princess*, in which he was reading, and made no answer to the tailor. The tailor appealed to Mr. Roland Bettesworth, who, his legs crossed, and already dressed, leaned against the side of the tall window and played with his sword-knot.

“It will be known to the Quality,” Mr. Boodle said, “that Mr. Bettesworth has his trousseau and his toilet of me, and I protest that to appear upon the Town in white satin, unless one is to marry on the morrow——”

“Friend Boodle,” Mr. Roland Bettesworth said from the window, “my brother will wear the white

satin. Spare your breath, and send it home before noon."

Mr. Boodle finished rolling his patterns up in his apron, and rising to his feet, he sighed—

"To be sure there is only one button-hole to sew. It shall be here by noon," he said. His large spectacles hung sideways over his nose; the breast of his snuff-coloured, linsey-woolsey coat was decorated with an innumerable multitude of pins. He had a piece of chalk above his right ear; his tape-measure hung from his breeches' pocket to a level with his shins; and his feet, in black slops, shuffled unhappily when he went out of the door. Mr. Roland ran out and overtook him on the great stone landing. He caught him by the opening of the waistcoat and pushed him almost behind a shoulder-high, red granite pedestal, upon which stood a white marble Susannah drawing her garments about her with one hand and modestly extending the other towards the beholder. Having the tailor well pinned in here, Mr. Roland Bettsworth planted his legs apart, pushed his black, three-cornered hat back on his head, and stood with his arms akimbo.

"The necessary, Brother Snip," he said; "unpouch the Jacobuses, the Carroluses, the Moidores, the Shekels."

Cowering behind the statue, the little tailor gave vent to grunts and gasps of despair and want of comprehension.

"Why, if you had read as many old plays, Brother Snip, as my brother Bettsworth, you would know that these are gold coins, and gold coins I

will have of you. Guineas, broad guineas, as the present Age has it. But what's in a name——?"

Again the tailor squeaked.

"—Now, here was our compact. When, being bearleader to my brother Betterworth, I commended to him your shears, I was to have half your bill and you were to double each of the items on it. Now you have an order for three hundred and twenty-six guineas, and I will have one hundred and sixty-one and a half. Now! Instantly! *Precipitado!*"

"But, sir," the tailor said, "the amount of my bill against you is more than that. I was minded to keep this money, and then you will be honourably out of any debt."

Mr. Roland threw his head back and laughed.

"Honourably, quotha," he said. "For the two thieves that we are that is a fine word. No, sirrah, understand first this one simple thing: I will have one hundred and sixty-one and a half guineas from thee, and then I will discourse upon the point of honour."

Mr. Boodle sighed, "But how can I tell, my master, that the Worshipful, your brother, will pay my bill?"

"Why, goodly Snip, my brother, as you well know, owns half of Salisbury Plain; and though he had been as profligate as I, since he came into this fortune but the last month as ever was, surely you will not think it is all dissipated now? Consider, too, this monstrous house, and all these crabbed pictures of our ancestors. Egad! if I had the selling of them——"

"You would pay my bill," the tailor said.

"Damme, Snip! if thou should'st see one maravedi of it," the young man answered.

The tailor took a little wooden snuff-box from his skirt pocket and lapped snuff from his thumb with his dry nostrils.

"If this coat is to be finished by noon," he said, "your Mastership must let me be gone home."

"But my one hundred and sixty-one and a half guineas?" Mr. Roland said.

". . . I will give you a bill of six months for it, and you shall get it discounted where you will."

Mr. Roland rested his hand on his sword-hilt, and wagged his scabbard beneath the skirt of his blue coat.

"Oh, damme!" he said again, "that will never do."

"It is all that will be done," the tailor answered.

"Then shall I denounce your bill to my brother, and you lose his custom!"

"Then shall I tell Mr. Bettsworth," the tailor said, "that you have bidden me charge him double so that you might have half. Then your Worship would lose the ordering of your brother's purchases."

"Oh, I am not so assured of that," Mr. Roland answered. "My Squire brother is the oddest, crabbedest, most obstinate, most egregious creature that ever was known. When you think you have him in one place, up he starts in another. When you think he would act, he will sit as still as a pig. So that I tell you, friend Snip, that if you should advise him this moment that I am set to take this reasonable perquisite, it is all one that he might

say: 'Beggary tailor, shall a younger son not exist upon the superfluity of his elder? Get thee hence, thou Starveling!' And so he would thrust a thousand pounds into my bosom and bid me spend it at the tables. Sir, he is a very unaccountable person. And if he had not made the Grand Tour when he was three-and-twenty,—because my uncle was seized with the whimsy to travel,—if he had not made the Grand Tour seven years ago, my brother would have been as musty a rustic as ever was Squire Granky in the play. Now this whimsy of a white coat, can you explain that, friend Snip?"

"... Unless it be that his mistress have bid him wear it, to tease him."

"Nay, he has no mistress," Mr. Roland answered, "—or none in the Town. He may have fathered half the brats on Salisbury Plain for aught I know. Your cold-eyed men are often given that way. But no, I will tell you how it is. When he was in Italy there was a painter called Perugia, or Graccho, or some such name, and this painter, being monstrously the mode at Rome, was able to force all the coxcombs and madams that came to see his work to put on white dominoes that he lent them. This he did because he said the high colours of their coats killed the low colours on his cloths. Now to-day the Worshipful, the head of my house, is minded to visit the paintings of one Hitchcock, which I have told him are monstrous fine. And he has said that he will make it the mode to do as much honour to our English Correggio as ever Italy can show to hers. So he will go in white, and nothing shall stop him. For he is what it is the mode to call a

‘Character,’ even as his and my uncle was before him. Did you ever hear tell of my uncle Bettesworth, Snip?”

Mr. Boodle rubbed his hand gently on his chin.

“Cocklaw Bettesworth,” he said; “I carried clothes home to him thirty years ago, before he went into the country for ever. It was a sad loss to the gaiety of the Town.”

“The gaiety of the Town,” Mr. Bettesworth ejaculated. “Gaiety, quotha! that’s a brave word for the surliest, sour-facest, rampiest old rustic uncle that ever cut a younger brother out of his will.”

MR. ROLAND BETTESWORTH was younger than Mr. Bettesworth by some six years. With a younger son's portion he had lived upon the Town mostly by means of post-obits. But upon the reading of his uncle's will, three months before, it was found that everything went to Mr. Bettesworth; and no one in the world could have been more chapfallen than Mr. Roland on the day of that ceremony.

It took place in the Manor-house of Winterbourne, on Salisbury Plain. Mr. Roland had not seen this house nor his brother in the last six years, for his uncle would neither let the younger son come down from Town nor the elder go up to it. The uncle having attempted to drive his coach up the steps of St. Paul's whilst the Te Deum Service was being held after the battle of Wagenau, and having been forcibly prevented by William the Third's order and by William the Third's Bodyguard—the uncle having arrived at the conclusion that this was his right as Lord of the Courts-Baron of Winterbourne, of Bassett, of Pitt Minima, and of Cheveril St. Francis. The most learned jurists have since denied this claim, which was revived by his nephew, the present Mr. Bettesworth, the decision being that the

right which was granted by Henry the Third had been to ride one horse and lead three up the steps of the Church of St. Paul in the village of Ludger, the words of the deed being: "*Ecclesiæ sancti Pauli apud Lugd*"—Squire Bettesworth had turned his coach right round from the steps of St. Paul's and had driven down to Winterbourne, vowing that he would never come back to London unless the King, with his own hand, should lead his coach horses up the steps of St. Paul's during a Te Deum Service. This had never occurred; and, indeed, Mr. Bettesworth being a troublesome person both at Court and in the Parliament House, there seemed to be no reason why it should. Mr. Bettesworth had never in those thirty years returned to the Town of London. Once, having made a bet with the Earl of Pembroke that he would purchase from the Pope a picture by Raphael that hung in the Sistine Chapel, Mr. Bettesworth had set out by way of Southampton to take his nephew upon the Grand Tour. The Sistine Madonna he had been unable to purchase, but he had brought back a lady called Poppæa, who was declared to have been the mistress of Pope Innocent XII; and since then he had insisted that all his man-servants, down to his stable-lads, should be arrayed in the garb of the Halberdiers of St. Peter's. Poppæa, whether or no she had been the mistress of the Pope, was certainly the making of Mr. Bettesworth's heir. She was a large, wise, dark woman; and having once settled down at Winterbourne it seemed as if she became a part of the house itself. She grew fatter and fatter, and more and more idolent; and she was the one person

who could curb the passions of young Mr. Bettesworth. She said to him one day, and she repeated it many times: "Caro mio, you will always be a headstrong maniac. Cultivate, then, a coldness of manner." She taught him, indeed, in actual fact, to count forty before he spoke if he felt himself in any way agitated. "For," she said, "a man in anger is always ridiculous, and it is ridicule mostly that you will have to avoid in this world. Now, your actions will always be ridiculous. They will be chivalrous, obstinate, high-flown, tyrannous, or what you will. And what you have to achieve is the doing of these ridiculous actions in a manner that is not ridiculous. Cultivate, then, reserve. Act after long pauses. Speak after long pauses. If it is possible, you will, during these pauses, reflect and take a more prudent course. If that is not possible you will at least have the appearance of having acted and spoken after reflection, and that is always confusing to an adversary, if there be any adversary to deal with."

So that under the care of this lady, who was more than an aunt to him, during seven years the young Squire had grown to be thirty. He could fence; he could dance; he could read a great many Italian novels, English plays, and law books. He rode well to hounds; could use a hawk upon the Plain; and he was, above all, learned in the lives of painters and in the phraseology of pictures, which he had studied with assiduity and passion during his Italian journey. He had, it is true, a proper opinion of the worth of the Bettesworths of Winterbourne Longa. Winterbourne Longa lies in a hollow; he had to

climb long and weary hills before he could even see land that would not be one day his own. And from the tops of those downs how many weathercocks of churches could he not see,—villages where, when on a Sunday he came out of church, the inhabitants would kneel down until he was past them. He was tall, erect and fair, aquiline nosed, rather sharp jawed, and of that very symmetrical comeliness which is to be found more particularly amongst the Anglo-Saxons of the West of England. As a young man he had been rather slight of figure, but when he was rising thirty he rode already thirteen stone without the saddle. He spoke Italian as well as English; he was an assiduous dancer in the Assemblies of the City of Salisbury; the Earl of Pembroke liked his company and he imagined that when at last he should come to his own he would dictate the tastes and fashions of London Town much as he imagined his uncle had done before him. And he thought that once his foot was in the stirrup he would assert the claim to drive up the steps of St. Paul's more successfully, because more tactfully, than his uncle had done. In the meantime he hunted much. He had a very excellent strain of game-cocks of his own breeding; he paid some attention to the lands and needs of his uncle's tenants, and imagined that he paid a great deal; and he was fond of lecturing his dependents on the duties of their stations.

It would have been more difficult for him to step into his uncle's shoes had that hard-swearing, broad-faced, bulky figure not lain for more than six months before its burial in paralytic silence in a room full of bleeding-basins and lancets. And his uncle's

stroke occurring just ten days before Michaelmas, the young Squire had upon his hands the full authority to renew leases, to preside at the Audit dinners and at the Courts, where the Copyholders rendered suit and service. This had, indeed, given him a still stronger sense of the immense authority that God had placed in his hands. He imagined himself about to become the third or fourth richest Commoner in England, and he knew himself to be vastly wealthier than the Herberts,—all this wealth and power being set upon that firmest of all bases, the land, the very Earth itself.

The reading of the will took place in the great dancing-hall of the Manor-house. The attorneys and their clerks sat at a table covered with green cloth. Beside them, immediately on the one side, sat the Signora Poppæa, now very fat and with gouty fingers, dressed in a great black panniered dress, with a large black fan, and a formidable black cap that rose to nearly a foot above her head. Behind her stood the new Squire in a black coat, with a mourning sword, his hair tied by immense black ribbons; and just beside her chair stood Roland, hat in hand, dressed like his brother. On the other side of the table were some poor Bettsworths from Yeovil, and all behind them stood a large crowd of bare-headed tenantry, of stewards, of water-bailiffs, of parsons, and of the other humble dependents. They were kept in their place in a half-moon ring by the servants who, still habited like Halberdiers of the Pope of Rome, exhibited no other sign of mourning than immense streamers of black hanging from huge battle-axes at

the head of their pikes. Mr. Bettesworth regarded this last exotic display of his late uncle's eccentricity with a certain haughty disfavour. He had an idea *that it rendered him ridiculous to stand in this ring* of retainers, attired for all the world like beef-eaters. Indeed, seeing the world very much through the Signora Poppæa's eyes, the whole ceremony appeared to him to be of a barbarous and grotesquely antique kind.

A small lawyer arose from the table and, making three bows, stood before him, holding out in front of his spectacles the long vellum strip with the air and attitude of a town-crier announcing a sale by auction.

"Give him a bell," Roland whispered, "and let him cry: 'O yez! O yez! O yez!'"

And so, declaring him to be sound body and mind, old Mr. Bettesworth's voice spoke from the grave. Young Mr. Bettesworth was his sole heir: Poppæa was left the use of the Dower House at Berwick St. James, and one hundred pounds wherewith to purchase a portrait either of the late Pope Innocent XII or of Squire Bettesworth himself, according to which of the two mates, upon reflection, she preferred. Poppæa smiled pleasantly. The largest sum that had been conferred upon any bona-roba since 1610 had been settled upon her when she left Rome under Mr. Bettesworth's protection. So that the poor Bettesworths on the other side of the table, unaware of this fact, were able to smile maliciously, until these in turn were brought up by the mention of their names, coupled in each case with a sum, larger indeed than they

had expected, but accompanied by a condition or a comment which made him or her for the moment the laughing-stock of the whole assembly. Miss Lavinia Bettesworth of Cuddesdon, a lacrymose spinster of fifty, got up, indeed, to whisper to the attorney's clerk.

Must she indeed use this two thousand pounds as her wedding portion, or in the alternative for the purchase of handkerchiefs to be wept into on the deaths of her successive spaniels? She was sure, she said, that she could not use so many handkerchiefs as two thousand pounds' worth in the whole of her life; and as for husbands, she detested the creatures! •

Mr. Roland Bettesworth laughed with the rest, but as the reading of the will went on his face grew longer and longer; and then they came to the words: "Item, to my nephew Roland Bettesworth I do give and bequeath the sum of one shilling in lawful English money to dispose of as he will, and the sum of twenty shillings wherewith to purchase a spyglass the better to see the life of London."

Mr. Roland Bettesworth became of a deadly pallor. He grinned stiffly, and muttered: "A hit! The old boy has made a hit!" For his quarrel with his uncle had been that he had gone up to London Town to see the life of it. He heard no more of the reading of the will, but stood, white and pallid, looking down at the ground, and a long time afterwards the Halberdiers cleared the large room. •

The Signora Poppæa sat large and inert; only her black eyes twinkled and moved. From the

dining-room, of which the door stood open behind their backs, in the centre of the great wall there came a clink of glasses and the sound of many voices. The poorer Bettsworths were regaling themselves. Mr. Bettsworth stood erect, his eyes looking straight in front of him. Tall windows showed the lawns of the not very large garden bounded by a high brick wall; an immense yew-tree towered up very close to the house and darkened the windows at the lower end of the hall.

"You are thinking," the Signora said in Italian, "that now, at last, you will cut that tree down? Tell me, how does it feel to be in power? Will you chase me, the parasite, from this house? and what will you do with that poor wretch there?"

Mr. Roland Bettsworth did not understand the Italian tongue. Mr. Bettsworth bent slowly down, and raising the Signora's hand upon his white fingers put it gracefully to his lips.

"You have been the saving of this house from much shame," he said, "for you have curbed many of the worst extravagancies and follies of my uncle, and the man that I am I owe to you. Therefore it is my intention that you shall come with me to London, and there live in any grandeur of condition that shall be to your mind."

"Oh, po-wow-wow!" Mr. Roland said. "Whilst you kichi-kichi I must get myself ready to take purses on the high road. I thank God that I have a good horse and a pair of pistols in my holsters; and for a visor, may I not cut holes in my mourning band?"

He cocked his hat under his arm, snapped his

heels together, bowed ceremoniously to Mr. Bettesworth, and said—

"Squire brother, I felicitate you upon the eleven months and eighteen days by which you preceded me to the world."

"Why, I am six years older than you," Mr. Bettesworth said.

"Oh, a fico for niceties of reckoning," Mr. Roland said. "Had it been of two hours, sure, it would have been all one. You would still have rolled in your coach, and I should still have popped my head in at the window with the barkers at your nose, and so relieved your purse of its great weight."

"There are easier ways of lightening my purse," the Squire said gravely. "Think of some of them."

"—What! shall I put your name to a bill?"

The Signora Poppæa regarded them indulgently with her kind eyes.

"What should I do in your London," she said; "a poor, fat old woman that hobbles on a stick? No, if your Worship will trust me not to steal your silver——"

The Squire opened his mouth impatiently to speak, but the old lady interrupted him—

"Count forty before you speak. I am talking ironically of stealing your spoons, and I know you are very vexed that I will not come with you to London Town. But that I will not come is certain, for, in the first place, I am too old to learn new manners; and in the second place, as you know, I do not think it justice that great Signors should live in idleness, eating up in the Metropolitan City the rents that are wrung from the earth by their

sweating hinds, and leaving no supervisor and no dispenser of charities upon their domains."

"I will have your company and your advice in London," the Squire said petulantly. "I will have it; I desire it; I need it."

"Let us consider now the case of this young man, your brother," the Signora said, "for I am very determined not to come with you to London, but will stay here to administer this house, where I am very comfortable. That from time to time you will need advice in larger matters, such as matters of the heart, I can well believe. For that purpose you may come down here to receive my advice if you will have it. But in such matters as what clothes you should choose, or what company you should seek, I could help you very little—or rather, not at all. This much is determined and settled. Now, what will you do for your brother, since your uncle has very badly treated him?"

The Squire walked across the hall to close the door upon the feasters. Having reached the punch-bowl, they were making very loud noises. He came slowly back; his head hung down, whilst he reflected.

"Hark'ee, Roland," he said, "you are a man of fashion?"

"Of a very poor fashion as the cat jumps," Roland said. "You have got all the gold I should have had."

"How many years shall I live?" the Signora asked in Italian. "Let us say ten. Then for ten years you must provide for this brother of yours. When I die he shall have all I have."

A spasm of jealousy passed over the Squire's face.

"You like him better than you like me," he said.

"It is not liking, but justice," she said. "My fortune should help you very little, such as it is; but such as it is it came from your uncle, who has used this young man very badly."

Bettesworth said: "Well, well!" but the young man burst in—

"Hark'ee, brother, and you Signora. This is cursed ill-breeding to jabber in that lingo while my neck is in the noose. If there is any money for me, let me have it. If not, let me go."

"I am minded to instal myself in Bettesworth House in London," the Squire said.

"Then I must pack from there, too?" Roland asked bitterly, for he lived in three rooms of the great Bettesworth House that was in Golden Square.

"There is no need until I marry," Bettesworth answered.

"And when will you marry?" Roland asked.

"When I find a wife," the Squire said, and Roland ejaculated: "Oh!" He had thought that his brother's intention had been to marry the Signora Poppæa.

"Now tell me," the Squire said, "do you know a man of some fashion who is all that a man of fashion should be, who eats grossly, cocks his wig on the wrong side, hems when he should not hem, and does all things ill? So you know of such a man and is he to be hired?"

Roland Bettesworth, who as yet knew his brother very little, raised his eyebrows.

"Do you need a running footman?" he asked.

"No, I seek a tutor in the ways of the Town," the Squire answered gravely.

Roland pushed his wig on one side and scratched the back of his head.

"Are you minded to become such a bear, brother," he said, "as was our worthy uncle, who set all London by the ears with his brawlings?"

"It is for that reason that I would have such a man always before my eyes," Bettsworth said, "the better to avoid his example."

"But, brother . . ." Roland began.

The Signora blinked with enigmatic amusement.

"I am determined upon this," Mr. Bettsworth said grimly, "for I will know what to avoid still more than what to do, and this was the expedient of the Spartans. Surely such a man can be found. Is not Tom Rakes such an one?"

Roland Bettsworth, having shrugged his shoulders minutely, addressed himself seriously to the matter.

"You may find fifty," he said, "by sending a crier round Golden Square. Tom Rakes is such an one, but he is it only by will and in low companies. He is a cully and a bully, a cheat and a braggart, when he likes; but in the society of his betters he is very well behaved."

"Then he will be of no use to me," the Squire said, "for I am his better. Yet I have seen him comport himself very ill at our Assemblies at Salisbury."

"Oh, your Assemblies at Salisbury!" Roland Bettsworth said ironically.

"Well, I am anxious to learn, brother," the

Squire said. "Are our Assemblies at Salisbury utterly contemptible? Could one not mention them without raising laughter in a fashionable rout?"

"Oh, brother, brother," young Bettesworth said, "all this is much too raw. Your Salisbury Assemblies may be, very well, — they may be monstrous well near Salisbury, — but if you mention them in Town it must be only in such a way as that, in giving a toast, you should say: 'Here's to the fine eyes of Maria that shot the fatal dart through me in the Salisbury Assembly, where I was by accident owing to the breaking of my coach-wheel.' Or, again, you might say, that at the Salisbury Assembly, where you went out of duty to your tenantry, you observed a monstrous ridiculous lady who said: 'Tee-hee!' and was sick with a surfeit of macaroons. But as for hired bullies, riformados, returned captains that never trailed a pike nor smelt saltpetre, why, if you will go in the Park when the fashion is there, if you will throw up a sheet of paper with your desire writ upon it, a hundred will start out of the ground before it touches earth. But if it is not a hired bully you desire, but only a poor person of quality who is gross and oafish and to be hired, why I commend you to Jack Williamson, who is brother to the Squire of Crawley. It is true that he is kept by Sir John, the husband of our cousin, Lady Eshetsford, to be made a butt of. Jack Williamson can do nothing well, nor say anything but folly, so that in the course of a day he will three times upset his cup of clary on Cousin Polly's gown and

twice fall over her ladyship's lap-dog. But I will wager Sir John keeps him so straitened that you may easily buy him to be your butt, or a foil to show off the handsomeness of your person, or whatever it is that you desire him for. And Sir John will part with him, I think, not very unwillingly, for he maintains him only to plague his wife, whom the goodly knight cannot abide. But how will all this save me from taking purses on the highway?"

"And our cousin Polly?" the Squire asked. "How does she stand in the world of fashion?"

"Oh, Lady Eshetsford is—Lady Eshetsford! She is at the head of the Ton; to be commended by her for your figure or your address is to be a made man with all women of quality. She has a laughing mouth and a drooping eye, and, for all she wields a fan with the best of them, she is said to have so tender a heart that she does more for her husband than most husbands care to have done for them."

"And her husband does not affect her?"

"Oh, her husband is one of your rake-helly Parliament men who squanders his substance in brothels, beats watchmen, and returns home at two in the morning—if he return at all—with a crowd of choice spirits like Jack Williamson and my Lord Pomain, to howl in her ladyship's antechamber and wake her from her sleep. Sir John desires to spoil her ladyship's beauty, he says, but he succeeds ill. He had once great lands in Hampshire, but I think they are all gone save such as are entailed, and his wife's jointure, which is a pretty penny."

"And how stands our cousin affected to you?" the Squire asked.

"Oh, Polly likes me well enough," Mr. Roland answered. "She has said that, had I your inheritance, I should be the prettiest young fellow about the Town. And her ward Maria—— In short, I have my place at Polly's table four days a week, if I have not elsewhere to eat."

He spoke with an unaffected negligence. Mr. Bettesworth asked in Italian, of the Signora Poppæa: "Do you think my brother speaks truth?" And the Signora answered: "He has all the air of it. But to test him you must surely wait until you come to Town to see for yourself."

"But I design to put this poor fool out of his agony," the Squire said.

"I have nothing against it," the Signora answered. "Only count forty before your generosities as before your angers."

The Squire stood still and silent, as if he were reflecting. And suddenly Roland Bettesworth broke out—

"Curse me, brother! if you were not my brother I would run you through the vitals. This is the very damn'dest bad breeding, and you are not so much my brother neither; for though we were begot by one father, yet you have so robbed and cozened me, and fawned upon my uncle and back-bitten, that here I stand, a broken man, with ten times your parts. You are only a poor rustic, trained to do no more than hallo after any four-footed creature that will do you the compliments to flee before you. You have no parts; you have no

presence; you cannot so much as twirl a cane in the approved manner. In short, you have gained a great inheritance by remaining a rustic brute. If I had stayed like you, training my nose to the scent of a hare, I might have shared my uncle's inheritance, but had remained a booby. Now, I am the elegantest blood upon the Town—ask Polly Eshetsford if that is not so. And I thank God, though I have not a maravedi in my fob, that I am not such an one as thou, brother of mine."

The Squire crooked his hat under his arm and bowed minutely.

"Brother Roland," he said, "if your plain-speaking be equalled by your elegance, then, indeed, you may well be the elegantest young blood upon the Town; and the whole manner and course of your future livelihood, in so far as it is in my hands, and if you will not liefer take the road, depends upon this, that you be the mirror of modes. But hark'ee, Tom, if this be not so, an ensigncy in a marching regiment shall be all that falls to your part from the purse of me. But if Polly Eshetsford endorse——"

"Oh, Cousin Polly will endorse all that and more," Roland Bettesworth grumbled between his teeth.

"Then I will take you," the Squire began, "as my master of horse, as my steward, as my major-domo—as anything you will save my brother. For I am certain there is very little brotherly love between us."

Roland pulled out from the table the little tabouret stool upon which the attorney had been sitting, and for the first time sat down.

"This would call for a great deal of reflection,"

he said ; "but with the devil behind me what the devil else can I do ?"

"To take the road would be a freer life," his brother said maliciously.

"Till it ended at the end of a confining rope," Roland answered. "How would you like to have it said that a Bettsworth had adopted High Toby ?"

"It would only enhance the rumour of my great possessions as showing that I had all," Mr. Bettsworth retorted, "and get me the more adulation."

Roland bent down to pluck a small white feather from his black silk stockings.

"As a man of broad acres," he said, "I am of no account. But when it comes to bear-leader am I not the most eminent that you should find ? Your need of me, then, is as great as mine of you."

"Brother," Mr. Bettsworth said, "if you will haggle, haggle. If you will leave it in my hands, leave it in my hands. Or if you will haggle and state your highest price, then I will double it. In short, you shall share my purse to the reasonable extent of the cost of living of a young man upon the Town. And this engagement shall continue between us until such times as I think fit to marry."

"Then it is set to me," Mr. Roland said, "to impede by all the means I can your marrying any woman."

"That risk I will take," said Mr. Bettsworth, with a grim humour. He squared his shoulders and stood erect, blond and masculine. "If it comes to a rivalry between you and me, I think I may bear

my part: But if you marry before me, you shall have a suitable settlement."

"So that it ends in a race between thee and me, brother," Mr. Roland said, "as to who first shall find a yoke-fellow."

III

AT three in the afternoon of the day when Mr. Boodle sent home the white satin suit, Mr. Bettesworth and Mr. Roland Bettesworth sat at dinner with their cousin, Lady Eshetsford, and her ward, Maria Trefusis. The room was very tall and white, the windows very tall with large square panes. The lackey, in his blue livery, wore a large bouquet of pinks in his button-hole, and carried in the dishes. The maid who served them had very short skirts, very high-heeled shoes, stockings with clocks, and a very bare throat over which was knotted a handkerchief of lawn.

"You have come from viewing Mr. Hitchcock's pictures," Lady Eshetsford said in a high and studied company voice. She held her elbows close to her waist and moved stiffly above her hips. "And you have not seen 'Celia in her Arbour'! That is to go to Venice and not to have seen the Campanile. It is the talk of the Town; it is the buzz of the Town. Mr. Hitchcock, now, will pay his rent, for he has been a tenant of ours this many year, and not a farthing of his money has our steward fingered."

"Madam," Mr. Roland answered, "in the two hours we were in the rooms I all the while bathed myself in the charms of that most delectable of

creatures,"—he bowed to Lady Eshetsford and muttered, "Save one," but he shot a long glance at Maria Trefusis, which Lady Eshetsford did not miss,—"but my brother," he continued, "is one of the Cognoscenti. Those two hours he spent over a three-four of canvases, with the artist at his side, and his increasing-glass, and his tape-measure."

Lady Eshetsford raised her eyes at her elder cousin.

"A new mode," she said. "La! what will the Cognoscenti be doing next!"

Pausing before he spoke, Mr. Bettsworth uttered gravely—

"It is no new mode, madam, but a series diversion I have set myself—none other than to discover the secrets of the chiaroscuro of the ancient masters. I hold a theory that in the case of nearly all their finest pieces shadow is to light in the proportion of two to one, and I have various other theories with which I will not weary you. But I made measurements of many hundreds of canvases when I was in Italy, and I have much evidence to support me. It was upon these measurements that I was engaged in Mr. Hitchcock's rooms this morning, and that is how I came not to attain to a sight of the piece you so belaud."

"La!" Lady Eshetsford said. "To be sure, I have the fellow of it somewhere in this house. It is a cloth called 'Celia Reading,' but it is a very small one. Stay, where is it now!"

She pressed her fingers to her forehead. "It was offered me this last week as ever was, by the painter, either as an act of homage or as in view of

the rent which he does not pay for the house in Ashford, where his wife and children live. But you shall see it," she said with affected briskness. "Maria, go look in my closet. Trott, go you and seek it in the blue chamber. Partridge, you to my anteroom, for I may have left it there."

And the three being suddenly gone, she leaned without any languor or haste across the table, and said, very business-like and with her voice natural, to Mr. Roland—

"Sir, give me the billet that you have been seeking all day to slip into Maria's hands."

Roland threw himself back in his chair and laughed.

"So your ladyship has seen all those little feints," he said. "The one with the hat behind my back?"

"And the one with the fan," her ladyship said. "And the glances and the squeezed hands."

Lady Eshetsford of Ashford—formerly a Miss Douglas of Blair Gowrie—had been twenty-eight when she married Sir John, the small-pox having attacked her thus late in life. But having passed through that ordeal unscathed, she was a very marriageable woman, and she was now thirty-two to her husband's forty-five. She had brought him a matter of ten thousand a year in lands which he could not hypothecate, and she was accounted the ruler of the modes and the sharpest tongue about the Town. At twenty-eight she had had, indeed, a laughing mouth and a laughing eye, as Mr. Roland Bettsworth had said. At thirty-two she had, under pressure from a detesting and brutal

THE PORTRAIT

husband, acquired an air of abstraction, of self-containment, and of power. Very tall, dark, with hair that was always powdered to a grey-white, the natural red upon her cheek-bones made her black eyes and red lips add an agreeable sympathy of red, white, and black. She wore at that moment a rather long skirt of grey silk, from which the overskirt of pink rose-embroidery upon white satin draped back, somewhat in the mode of a curtain drawing up on each side before scenery. This rose-embroidered satin came up in the jabot of her waist, so that grey-haired, grey-skirted, red-cheeked and rose-clad, mocking, but with quite firm intonation, as she reached across the small dining-table to take the note from her ineligible cousin, she made against the white of the panelling such a symphony of greys and pinks and whites as she very well knew how to calculate. And because she so well knew how to calculate these things she could make or mar any young man upon the Town. To be permitted to hold her fan was sufficient to make you eligible for an heiress with five thousand pounds. To have been understood to have enjoyed her more intimate favours was sufficient to let young Tom Wyndham, penniless as he was, make a match with the daughter of the Duke of Leeds. Leaning across the table, she had secured the little twisted note which had been intended by Roland Bettsworth for her ward, Maria. But suddenly, heralded by a splitting thump upon the white panels, and by the raucously shouted words—

“So I’ve claret in store
Then in peace I’ve . . .”

through the opening door, Sir John Eshetsford stumbled into the room. His three-cornered hat, together with his wig, sat over the right eye of his flushed countenance; one tail of his long blue coat was torn off, so that it hung, dangling, from a shred of gold lace before his knees.

"... and in peace I jog on to the devil."

He finished his snatch of song. His one eye, that could be seen, lit up incredulously and joyfully. "The devil!" he said. "In truth I have jogged on to the devil, and I feel his horns. They sprout, they sprout, on my own forehead."

His voice had in it both irony and liquor.

"So," he said, "I am come in time to see my lady's gallant hand my lady a billet. It is well my wig is over my eye or I should see two billets."

He rolled paunchily towards the table. Lady Eshetsford leaned perfectly motionless, her extended hand holding the white note very visibly in her fingers. Her face was expressionless; she remained dumb, and suddenly she tossed the note at Sir John's feet. In his effort to pick it up his hat and wig fell on to his toes; but unsteadily, and with a shaking hand, he untwisted the little note. His shaven head revealed a large cicatrice, the effect of a blow he had received from a pike in a scuffle with the watch four nights before. Swaying on his legs, he held the note a long way from his eyes and attempted, with great difficulty, to read it aloud. He had got as far in a muzzy voice as, "*Adorable charmer and angel*," when in the tall doorway behind him there appeared at once the figure of

staggered back. "Out of the way, Pander ! Here is my wife well furnished with a minx for a pimp and a white knight for a go-between. But I will have my sword about all your backs . . ."

Mr. Bettesworth did not speak ; he was counting forty. Mr. Roland Bettesworth leaned back on his chair, tilting the forelegs off the ground. He had his hands in his fob pockets, his coat-tails swept the floor. In spite of the discovery of his intrigue with Maria Trefusis he was grinning ironically.

"This is what it is to take other men's billets, my Lady Polly," he said. "And," thought he, "if a man may not come to it by the Buttery window an ardent flame will find out how to go down a chimney."

A deep and all-covering flush was upon the face of Maria Trefusis. She looked upon the ground and twisted the note between her fingers. She hated the disclosure. She dreaded her aunt's tongue in the privacy that would come afterwards.

Mr. Bettesworth's white figure, with the set face and the moving lips, gave Sir John the idea that here was a man tremulous with fear. His nose had been pressed almost against Mr Bettesworth's, and he staggered a pace and a half back to give himself room. His hand, with the muddled ruffles, fumbled at the torn skirt of his coat for his sword-head. His eyes blazed with the fury of a bully opposed to a coward ; his red cheeks grew more inflamed.

"By God ! I will cut off all your ears," he shouted. "I will slit your nostrils, as we did with the tailor's apprentice last night." He had by then found his sword-hilt, and wrenching at the handle, much as a

man does with a corkscrew, for the blade was rusty, he succeeded at last in drawing. Mr. Williamson, his long periwig sweeping the ground, having tried three times without success to assume an erect posture, had navigated the table behind Lady Eshetsford's back upon all-fours. And, with somewhat of the aspect of a spaniel, he leered at Mr. Bettesworth from beside his employer's bulging calves.

"Ay, slit noses, cut off ears!" he babbled, with a cheerful grin. "We're mohocks still if we cannot stand."

Mr. Bettesworth's grey steel came out from the thin black scabbard with what seemed to Sir John an extraordinary suddenness—with a suddenness so extraordinary that he felt upon his wrist the sharp pain of the touch of a light sword before his muddled brain had realised that he faced an adversary. His point dropped to the floor, and, beginning with his nose, a green pallor turned his features to a semblance of verdigrised copper.

"Must a man be betrayed in his own house," he said, with sarcasm and fear in his tones, "and then put to the arbitrament of swords? This is contrary to all precedent. Guilt and flight go hand in hand."

"Not when poltroonery will not pursue," Lady Eshetsford said, with a bitter contempt.

"Oh, now the bitch bays," Sir John answered. "Wait you, madam, till your gallants be gone!"

He drew his head back like a child from an extended spoon of medicine; the fine point of Mr. Bettesworth's sword seemed to tickle his Adam's apple. And Mr. Bettesworth trusted himself to speak.

"On your knees, Knight," he said, with a cold

fury. "If you raise a hand, if you breathe a word . . ."

Sir John, reeling to the rear, sat down upon the back of Mr. Williamson, who was crawling hindways towards the door. He had been put to so many more disagreeable usages, that merely to afford a seat to his patron seemed to him comparatively agreeable, and as long as he could he supported the burden.

Mr. Bettesworth approached nearer, and repeating, "On your knees!" held again his point to the Knight's throat. Sir John brushed it away petulantly as if it had been a wasp.

"A pretty pass," he said, "that a wronged husband should adopt the attitude proper to an erring wife!"

At this, first Mr. Williamson's arms and then his thighs gave way beneath him, and Sir John subsided on to the ground like a general whose horse is killed beneath him.

Mr. Bettesworth twisted away with his point Sir John's sword, that had fallen to the ground. It dropped near the window with a rusty jingling.

"I perceive," he said, with a cold humour, "that you can never rise to your knees, so you shall swear sitting."

"Swear!" said the Knight. "Good Lord, swear!"

"You shall swear that you shall never raise your hand to your wife; you shall never come into her presence without abjectly craving permission, and your bullies and companions never at all. Her name shall never be on your lips in taverns and at your drunken debauches. You shall never share her bed."

"Damn it all!" the Knight said, "will you take my place? What whorson/knave are you to come into my house and dictate how a knight shall live with his wife?"

"I am my lady's cousin, and, in descent from my uncle, trustee and the head of my family, and I am the best swordsman of the West of England," Mr. Bettesworth answered. "I take it upon me to alleviate her lot."

Sir John's jaw fell. Maria's eyes had grown wider and wider with admiration behind Mr. Bettesworth's white back.

"Heaven be praised!" she exclaimed. "Here is a Saint George come to us at last!"

"The family!" Sir John cried out, with a note of woe. "I have been dreading her plaguy family this three year. May not a man use his wife's body and dissipate her fortune in what wise he will, but a pesky parcel of black-browed families shall burst in on him with swords and cries! I have dreaded this, but I was safe whilst the uncle lived. He was a fellow after my own heart. I am a Parliament man, Knight of the Shire and Custos Rotulorum, and shall a family——"

"Swear!" Mr. Bettesworth said.

"Shall I knock upon my wife's door before I enter, like a lackey?" Sir John asked. "What if she is in the room with the cupboards where I keep my liquors? Shall I not get drunk when I will in my own house?"

"You shall not knock at a door like a lackey, but you shall send the lackey before you to ask if your presence shall be pleasing to her ladyship. And

into my cousin's presence you shall never come when you are drunk."

"Then, to be sure, if I am to wait till my presence is pleasing to her, and till I am sober, I shall never come into her presence again. For she has puked at me ever since we were married a fortnight, and I have not been sober since Christmas was a twelve-month."

"Swear!" Mr. Bettsworth remarked.

"This indeed," Sir John said, gazing, fuddled, at the ground, "is divorce *a mensâ et toro*, save that it leaves my wife free and me in nowise. And yet I am not sorry to be rid for ever of her haughty and mewling voice. Yes, I swear it; so she will leave me my ease I will leave her hers. For if she hate me as heartily as I hate her, this will be the first thing that I have done to pleasure her since we were married."

"Then get you gone till you be sober," Mr. Bettsworth said.

"*'Then farewell for ever my honey, my dear,'*" the Knight chanted, "for I mean to be drunk all the rest of the year." He shouted out: "Ho, Part-ridge! you and Thomas come bear me to my bed."

"Sir John," Mr. Bettsworth said, "I trust that you, as a Parliament man and as a Knight of the Shire, will observe your oath. Nor, indeed, do I doubt of it. But of this you may be certain, that if you cause so much as a frown to darken my Lady Eshetsford's brow, my sword shall be here again at your throat and then it shall not stop outside your skin."

"Oh, ay, your sword," Sir John humbled. "That is the way of the world. To corrupt a man's wife and then——"

His face became suddenly of a deep purple; he threw up his hands. From the sword-wrist that Mr. Bettsworth had scratched, blood had been running down on to the Knight's red knuckles. A vein that the sword-point had injured had burst under the pressure of his passion. There issued suddenly a pulsing stream of blood which fell over his shoulder and coat. And after a long pause he opened his eyes and gazed malignantly at Mr. Bettsworth.

"Ay," he said, "I think by that scratch you have done what you would not have done, having saved my life. So that you shall not for many years stand in my shoes."

He leered maliciously up at his wife.

"Ay, madam," he said, "that was very surely a stroke of apoplexy, and had your spark or gallant or lover, or spark's brother or gallant's brother or lover's brother—or whatever he is—not let my blood by scratching me near the wrist, I should as like as not be dead meat by now."

He stood up upon his legs, the relief from pressure of blood having sobered him.

"Your sword is a tricky instrument," he said to Mr. Bettsworth. "It cuts both ways, letting out life or death as the case may be."

Mr. Bettsworth said: "Sir, your very humble servant." And, still gripping his arm above the punctured wrist, Sir John cursed his way out of the room. He pushed two footmen aside, and when he

came to where his hat and wig lay on the floor, kicked them furiously against the skirting-board. Mr. Williamson had reached the door two minutes sooner. Partridge, the lackey, took his place by the sideboard again. The maid, with a basin and a cloth, removed from the polished floor the drops of Sir John's blood. Tom the footman ceremoniously recovered and carried off Sir John's sword, and Maria took her place again by Lady Eshetsford's side.

"You have not found the picture?" Lady Eshetsford said to Maria. Her voice was still touched with the scorn that she had felt for Sir John, but she controlled it so that it attained again to its company falsetto, and she stiffened her movements as etiquette demanded. "Now I remember, I had it placed in the north attic where the servants do not sleep."

She turned to Mr. Bettsworth, who also had resumed his place at the table, and sat very formal and erect.

"This painter, Hitchcock," she said, "is a man to whom I have long tried to be a patroness. But he has none of the tricks of his trade. He is not one to sit at your levee whilst your hair is being dressed, along with the musicians and poets and man-milliners and pedlars of virtue. But here in London he inhabits God knows what garret, and he has a little house on my land at Ashford where he keeps a wife and two buxom daughters. He is very round and very snuffy, his wig is as often as not back part to the front, and there depends always from his pocket a muddle of painter's rags."

"I have seen the man," Mr. Bettesworth said. "He has a mind very full of the secrets of his Art. I have never met one who seemed more cautious or secretive. I must needs be very haughty before he would suffer me to approach his pieces with any measure."

"But now I think his fortune is made," Lady Eshetsford said. "Half the Town will be buying of his pictures, and I hear that he is to be appointed Painter to the Dilettante Society. So he will paint so many portraits a year. For the Dilettante Society, though they are a drunken and roistering crew, and professed atheists, yet have this virtue, that they present each one his portrait to the Society upon their elections."

"Madam," Mr. Bettesworth said, "I am very sorry to hear, you speak thus of this Society, for this morning a very civil gentleman—Sir Francis Dashwood—waited upon me and informed me that I was made a member, and would have me to dine there upon Sunday night."

"Then you shall see for yourself," Lady Eshetsford said. "And, indeed, it is so much in the mode of the time to be debauched and an atheist, that you will be no more than a man of good manners if you blaspheme and are for ever in your cups."

"I trust," Mr. Bettesworth said, "that I shall never be anything that shall not please your ladyship."

"And I trust," her ladyship said, "that I never shall be anything but what shall be invariably pleased with Mr. Bettesworth."

IV

AT a very long table, between his brother and Mr. Jack Williamson, who for the time being was reasonably sober, Mr. Bettesworth sat listening to an oration from a gentleman arrayed in a red cassock—a parody of a preacher's gown. The table held forty men, nearly all of them young, and nearly all of them at that stage sober, though one young gentleman was pouring a bottle of claret over his forehead in the vain attempt to reach his mouth. The many-coloured line of coats in which blue predominated,—though there were some of purple, and the President wore a long gown of scarlet and ermine like a peer's robes,—the several sashes of the most noble Order of the Garter, the profusion of gold lace, the enormous dress-wigs minutely curled and falling behind and in front of the shoulders, all these things gave to the speaker's audience an air of distinction, of decorum, and of solemnity, that madly enhanced the effect of his blasphemous oration. It was as if the House of Peers sat to hear a sermon against the rights of the blood. The speaker had taken for his text: "*And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,*" and from that starting-point he proceeded to cast a polished

ridicule upon the story of the Creation. He mingled it with equally polished obscenities. Sir Francis Dashwood, afterwards Lord le Despencer, was at that date twenty-eight. The most striking of his features were his large violet eyes, that had dark rims round the irises. And, his very long, soft, and almost curling eyelashes gave to his glance a shrinking and feminine tenderness, even at moments when, as now, he most displayed hardihood and effrontery. He was reputed to be the most cynically wrong-living young man upon the Town, but he very seldom indulged in liquor to an excess or committed public outrages against the Law, such as were then the fashion, for he preferred to observe and to find humour in the gross excesses of his companions.

The Dilettante Society, of which he was a founder, and of which he was certainly the most moving spirit, was made up of men mostly young, whose qualification was that they should have made the Grand Tour, or that they should at least have visited Italy and have seen its masterpieces. A taste for the Arts of Painting and Sculpture being then one of the distinguishing marks of the aristocracy and gentry, the Society had for its avowed aim the promotion of those Arts. How exactly it proposed to promote them was a matter of some vagueness. Perhaps it came most near to this object in that its members, by a social intercourse, revived the memories and the dissipations of the days when, under the guardianship of complacent and compliant tutors, they had found Italy so pleasant.

Mr. Bettesworth, with his somewhat tenacious mind was coldly but yet earnestly set upon honouring the Arts of his native country. At the very outset the manners and aspect of the company conveyed a distinct chill to him. It is true that round the walls, between the candle sconces, there were hung several Italian pictures. The gavel in the President's hand and the goblet before him were of silver chased by Benvenuto Cellini. But the very nature of the minutes of the last meeting, that were read by the Secretary from a book bound in scarlet morocco—their nature, and still more the comments with which they were received by members of the Club,—as, for instance: "Resolved that the compliments of the Society be particularly presented to Mr. Bland, along with the information that the Society desires that he should be damned," which elicited from the Duke of Norfolk and the Honourable Simon Harcourt a volley of remarks as to the said Mr. Bland's womenkind,—together with the mock solemnity of Secretary, President, Introducer of Guests, and Very Grand Master,—all these things induced in Mr. Bettesworth a feeling of choler and dislike.

He sat, therefore, listening to Sir Francis Dashwood's sermon with a growing irritation. Sir Francis had waited upon him with his deferential air, his soft and polished manner, and his shrinking eyelashes. Mr. Bettesworth had imagined that this Society was one of serious-minded noblemen intent upon—as Sir Francis said—the promoting of the Fine Arts in England. So that, finding himself in this company of rather lewd men, amongst whom,

hitherto, no word of the Fine Arts had yet been uttered, Mr. Bettesworth felt a sudden and profound distrust of his Introducer. He imagined that Sir Francis, with his fine smile and ironical manner, had come merely to fool him, had tricked him—taking advantage of his inexperience in the Town's ways—into coming to a drinking table under the pretence that it was a learned Society. "For," as he said to himself, "if he had said to me this was a boosing-ken or a blasphemy shop I should certainly have come, to see the world. But thus to have deceived me is surely an affront over which subsequently he will make merry with his friends."

In this, however, Mr. Bettesworth did his Introducer an injustice. Sir Francis and the Society considered that merely to meet together as Cognoscenti and men of birth was in itself very greatly to honour any Art. And if the meetings themselves witnessed no particular actions other than those of eating and drinking, that was, as it were, their recompense for the labours of coming together at all. For to dine was surely as meritorious an act of patronage as to permit one's name to be printed on the dedication page of a book.

The dinner was done, the bottles passed on, the waiters went round the walls snuffing the candles, and amidst incessant jeers and laughter Sir Francis commenced his peroration—

"Mr. President, my Lords and Gentlemen, so much for Creation and the Garden and Eve, and all the rest. But we have seen now upon the Town—and I think there is no man here so backward as not to have seen it—a created garden and a created,

serpentless Eve such as no seven days that the world has ever seen, did, could, or shall create. Had the Archangel who bears the name of the Supreme Raphael descended from heaven and used one of his pinion feathers for a brush, he could never have given us such beauty, he could never have given us such grace, he could never have limned for us such flowing limbs, such a languishing look, or such shining ringlets. The painter has chosen to clothe his Eve: thus he shows that though innocent she has knowledge of good and evil. . . ." At this juncture such a babble of appreciative shouts arose from his audience that Sir Francis's voice was lost. He drank a glass of wine, wiped his lips, smiled, and continued formally: "Gentlemen, it is my privilege—and no prouder privilege has been conferred upon any layman since the King of Spain was permitted to hold the brushes of the great Velasquez—it is my privilege to propose that a new office of this Society be created—that of Painter to the Society of Dilettante, and that the Painter of 'Celia in her Arbour' be forthwith elected to that office."

There was a great uproar of assent whilst this resolution was being put to the meeting, and then the Secretary and the Introducer—the one in a white burnous with a Moor's turban, the other in sea-green with a sash of gold cloth—having retired momentarily through the door at the end of the hall, dragged in the painter Roger Hitchcock, whom they had kept locked up in a little anteroom.

A short, paunchy man of maybe fifty, he had great spectacles, a very wrinkled face, and a rather

ironic expression. His old snuff-coloured coat was very baggy in the pockets; from one of them there depended a long paint-rag. Led by the hand to the top of the table, he was stood beside the President to receive the message of his election, and he remained blinking at the lines of faces intently and with no sign of perturbation, very much as if he were taking a professional interest in their aspect and seeking to take notes in his memory for a future picture. The President, with his fine clear features, turned sideways to the old painter, addressed him in terms of eulogy and welcome. Mr. Hitchcock received them with little half-impatient bobs, and, the speech being ended, he sat down, very business-like, in the chair that was placed for him on the President's right hand. There began immediately an enormous tumult, during which the President whispered in the painter's ear. As a result, Hitchcock was upon his legs again, leaning his knuckles upon the table, and holding in one hand the soiled paint-rag, which he had mistaken for his handkerchief.

"Gentlemen," he said in a little, penetrating voice, that he appeared to snap off into short lengths, "this honour is none of my seeking; making speeches is none of my trade. I was brought here by physical force. Sir Francis Dashwood, the Duke of Norfolk, and Mr. Simon Harcourt burst in on me in my painting-room and forcibly abducted me . . ." He took a pinch of snuff, waiting for the laughter and cheers to subside, then, still sniffing, he continued composedly—

"Dining and dinners have never entered into my

life. They and painting, I have always held, will never agree. But if I am to be hauled here by main force I must needs relent. I am sensible that you have done me a great honour, but I think it is rather to the beauty of my sitter that you have paid a tribute than to the beauty of my performance. Therefore you will not find me unduly puffed up, for I know very well you would rather have that lady sitting at this table than mine own self, and I consider myself to be her deputy only."

He waved his paint-rag in the air, wiped his nose with it, and sat down suddenly.

"By God! a mighty insolent speech," Sir Francis Dashwood said to Mr. Bettesworth across the face of Mr. Jack Williamson. "Did ever painter so speak to an assembly of gentlemen?"

"Why, Sir Francis," Mr. Bettesworth answered coldly, "if the man were indeed dragged here to be made a butt of I think he has spoken very moderately, and the insolence is ours of this Society."

Sir Francis gazed at him with his large and feminine eyes, his lips smiling.

"A hit," he said languidly. "I admit that I am hit, for mine was the inspiration to drag the painter here. But you will perceive this is the first thing the Society has done towards promoting the cause of the Fine Arts."

"I think it would have been better," Mr. Bettesworth said, "to have left it undone."

Mr. Simon Harcourt, a pale young man with a particularly large chestnut wig, called at this point, from the bottom of the table—

"Name, name? I move that Mr. Hitchcock be ordered to disclose the name of his 'Celia.'"

And the Duke of Norfolk echoed: "Ay, let us have the name for a toast."

"Her name, my lord," Mr. Hitchcock said dryly, "is Celia."

"Ay, but her name in the flesh," the Duke said.

"That I have forgotten," the painter answered.

"Oh, will you keep her all to yourself?" Mr. Simon Harcourt called out. "I thought you had a wife and family?"

"Well, they are hidden down in the country," the painter said.

Sir Francis said, "Oh! oh! oh!" and then rose to his feet.

"Mr. President," he said, "I move that the offer of the Painter to the Society be accepted, and that instead of himself this lady be given a perpetual seat at the table."

"I second that," Mr. Harcourt called out; "and I will be the one to fetch her here."

"And I will have the housing of her," the Duke of Norfolk said.

"No, by God!" Dashwood said, "she shall be mine."

A gentleman in a scarlet coat said, from the bottom of the table—

"Why, she must fall to the highest bidder."

"Then it is certain we must have her name," the Secretary said.

"That you never shall from me," the painter answered pleasantly.

"Then we must go find her," Mr. Simon Harcourt exclaimed.

The gentleman in the red coat cried hilariously: "Brava! I bet Mr. Harcourt a thousand pounds against a thousand that I will be the first to find her, provided the painter will keep his mouth shut."

Mr. Harcourt cried: "Done!" And then: "I bet the Duke of Norfolk two thousand pounds against two thousand that I will be the one to fetch her here."

The Duke of Norfolk said calmly: "Done!" and added, in his low, distinct voice: "I will bet Sir Francis Dashwood three thousand pounds that I will have the housing of her."

A moment of perturbation moved Sir Francis's mobile eyebrows. He was tacitly challenged, in the face of all that Assembly, to exceed the Duke of Norfolk both in the amount of his wager and in the feat he should undertake. Then the smile came back to his lips, his glance fell upon Mr. Bettesworth.

"I will bet Mr. Bettesworth four thousand pounds," he said, with his calm, clear voice, "that if she be of approved and virtuous life, whosoever she be, if she be not already married, I will marry this lady."

A very strong anger was in Mr. Bettesworth's heart. He cried out—

"I will bet each of the four gentlemen who has already betted five thousand pounds apiece that I myself will find, fetch, house, and marry this lady, subject to the proviso that Sir Francis Dashwood has made, each and all of us to be bound by their promise of honour not to question Mr. Hitchcock, and Mr. Hitchcock to bind himself to give no clue."

There was a little buzz of subdued conversation round the table, and then Mr. Roland Bettesworth said: "By God! a cool bet, brother, when you have not seen the picture."

"Not seen the picture!" Sir Francis exclaimed, his eyes opening wider. "Oh!"

He appeared to reflect for a moment, his glance upon the tablecloth, and then he said, "Well, we have all taken your bet. Let it be inscribed in the minutes of this Society, and we will put our names to it. But there must be a term agreed upon."

"Oh, surely there must be a term agreed upon," the Duke of Norfolk said. "It might last twenty years. I should not wish to have the housing of a wrinkled and toothless creature. Let us say six months."

"Your Grace," Mr. Bettesworth said, "let us make it one month, and let us have a committee of inquiry into all other matters before we begin. I would wish to invite all the gentlemen who have betted to drink a dish of coffee at my house to-morrow, in the afternoon."

V

CROUCHING in the darkness, under the garden wall of Ashford House, Mr. Roland Bettesworth threw up several times an iron hook, which had attached to it a stout cord. The hook caught at last in the *cheveux de frise* that crowned the wall, and, with a heavy cloak over his arm, with some difficulty he commenced the ascent of the rope, which was knotted at intervals to give him a foothold. At the top of the wall, swinging by one hand, he contrived with the other to cast his cloak over the spikes. Arrived on the top, he sat himself down complacently upon the cloak. He let the rope down upon the other side of the wall, and sat peering into the thick darkness. "The leaves of an aspen rustled perpetually in the faint wind; a nightingale began to sing high up in the dusky obscurity, and suddenly a small, clear voice said from below—

"This has cost me two paduasoy mantuas."

Mr. Roland swiftly descended his rope and landed in a bed of flowers. In the thick darkness he could hardly perceive more than the loom of two figures and the faint white disks of two faces.

"Why, I will buy the two mantuas back from the excellent Trott for five guineas," he said, "and

he waded through the high flowers till his feet touched the gravel of the walk. "Maria, adorable charmer!" he exclaimed, and held out his arms.

"Trott, you perceive, is here," Maria Trefusis exclaimed.

"Angel of light," he said, "can you not trust yourself with me?"

"In the dark," she answered, "I would rather trust myself to you and Trott. What is your very great news?"

"My brother, Mr. Bettsworth," Roland said, "has betted a round twenty thousand pound that he will marry the lady who was the model for 'Celia in her Arbour.'"

Maria Trefusis said: "Oh! oh! oh!" and in the darkness the maid Trott tittered.

"Now," said Mr. Roland, "how may I best turn this to account? Twenty thousand pound is a round sum, and from it, win or lose, if the matter be skilfully handled, there should be some pickings for me—and for the excellent Trott," he added.

In the dark Trott appeared profoundly, and in silence, to consider the matter.

"I do not see how my brother can win the bet," Mr. Roland continued. "Or, indeed, he cannot win the bet, the lady being married, but I very much desire that he should continue for a long time in the search, for so long as he continues seeking he will remain unmarried, and so long as he remains unmarried, but no longer, I shall retain my post about his person and my comfortable honorarium. And with a few lucky casts of the dice. . . . Oh, rapture!"

"You will never gain enough by the dice to marry me upon," Maria said. "You have been making the attempt too long."

"The more likely that Fortune will smile. The luck must change if one keeps at it long enough. Fortune's a woman, to be won by wooing."

"Fortune's a jade," Maria said, "that loves not empty purses."

"I can give you but four minutes more," Trott said. "Sir John's nurse may call to me at any moment for sherry whey or posset, or who knows what."

"Sir John's nurse!" Mr. Roland exclaimed.

"Sir John is very ill," Maria answered. "Ever since your brother confronted him—how like a lion he was!—Sir John has kept his bed. They say he babbles and clutches at the bedclothes. And these should be bad signs."

"Then!" Mr. Roland exclaimed.

"Then," Maria answered.

"This will need very careful reflecting upon. I had not thought of this."

"I can give you no more time," Trott said remorselessly.

"Oh, a quarter of an hour—ten minutes—only five," Mr. Roland said.

But the maid answered: "You must back into the house, mistress. My place suits my taste too well for me to lose it."

"Lord! what a thing these servants be! How smooth and fawning before the public eye; how tyrannous in private! For there is not a woman of the world but has her secrets, and needs private letter-carriers and the like."

"Madam," the girl said, "if you gave more time to courtship, or the business in hand, and less to sentiments upon things in general, you would get more said."

"Well, I am coming," Maria said. She began to move away, and then came back.

"Mr. Roland Bettesworth," she said, "I do not think that I am any more minded to marry you, but I will keep secret in the matter of the portrait. And for Trott, you must buy her secrecy as best you may."

"Not minded to marry him!" Trott exclaimed. "What has the poor gentleman done?"

"Oh, I know very well," Maria answered, "that you have found my secret meetings with Mr. Roland Bettesworth a source of profit, and that you have cut short this meeting in order to make a second out of it. But if a woman may love, a woman may withdraw her love, and I am minded to withdraw mine."

Mr. Roland fell upon one knee on the garden-path, and, though he found the stones cruel to his knee, he protested valiantly of broken hearts.

"Oh, I know very well," Maria said, "you are practised in lamentations. You have five other flames that I know of, and how many others? Sukey Tremaine has shown me your billets to her, and there are the same doves and Cupid's arrows, and tresses and ringlets and despairing sighs, as there are in all of mine."

"Jealousy!" Mr. Roland exclaimed. "I swear——!"

"Oh, do not swear," she answered. "I know you will say I am the only one. I could say it all for you, with the fitting gestures and apostrophes. So I am not jealous. But you may think, if you like, that I have seen a man that I like better. I will be a sister to you."

Mr. Roland answered: "One kiss!" She dwindled away into the darkness, and he rose to his feet exclaiming: "The devil, and I have to climb back over this weary wall!"

Mr. Bettesworth rose very betimes on the morrow. He neglected his levee of tradesmen, poets, and musicians, and having permitted himself to be dressed with haste, if with care, he sat for some time reflecting. The buzz of half-awe which his incursion into the betting of the night before had created filled him with a secret satisfaction. The monstrous nature of the bet was sufficient to ensure for him a great measure of distinction. And if the task set him was a hard one, and the search appeared a little insane, he was undertaking it in very good company. Moreover, the search and the undertaking were, on his part, so much the bolder in that he had never seen the picture itself. He was, however, going to rectify that omission very immediately, and having drunk his cup of morning chocolate he took his stick and his hat and set out for the Argyle Rooms, where Mr. Hitchcock's pictures were being shown. He had the pleasure of seeing Sir Francis Dashwood, very light, debonair, and smiling, holding a little lace handkerchief in his hand, run down the high, rounded steps into the street, and walk away in the

opposite direction beside a sedan-chair carried by two porters in Sir Francis's own livery. It occurred to him that, like himself, Sir Francis was attempting to refresh his memory with a careful study of the picture.

Mr. Hitchcock was alone in the first room, small, square and low, lit from above, and hung round with landscapes, and portraits of gentlemen in red coats, and ladies with small busts and very *décolleté* shoulders. Mr. Hitchcock was smiling his sardonic, inscrutable smile; his spectacles were down on the bottom of his nose. In the palette on his thumb he had a formidable array of brushes.

"You are come to measure more pictures?" Mr. Hitchcock asked.

"No, I am come to measure my wit against Sir Francis Dashwood's," Mr. Bettesworth answered.

The old painter laughed.

"You must rise very early to do that," he answered.

Mr. Bettesworth moved past him into the farther room. Here there were hung hunting-pieces, flower-pieces, and sea-scapes. He ran them all over with his eye. He could see no picture containing a woman of any kind. In the wall immediately facing him there was, however, a blank space. He turned his head over his shoulder and asked of the painter: "Where is 'Celia in her Arbour'?" and the old man smiled a not very mirthful smile.

"Sir Francis," he said, "bought that piece of me this morning, and carried it off in a sedan-chair."

"Mr. Bettesworth counted forty before he spoke.

VI

MR. BETTESWORTH found Lady Eshetsford still at her toilet, in a flowing bedgown of white and silver and pink, her dark hair as yet unpowdered. She was much gayer, she spoke in a voice more natural, her motions were more sinuous, her hands more free. She sat to a Chinese table of greenish-yellow olive-wood, from the centre of which there rose a tall mirror framed in silver. Let into the table-top were twelve small cells containing a profusion of little articles, patch-boxes in French porcelain, powder-dredgers in English silverware, pomanders in silver gilt, and a number of little golden keys. Lady Eshetsford was just dismissing a small milliner with a huge band-box. Trott, with her demure face and downcast eyes, stood behind the mirror, and, obèdient and silent, Maria was at her guardian's side.

"No, I will buy no more silks," Lady Eshetsford was saying to the milliner as Mr. Bettesworth was admitted, "—or not for some days yet." And then she threw back her head and laughed and laughed and laughed. "Here is our wagerer," she said. "Have you come to seek clues here?"

Mr. Bettesworth, who had dressed with an unusual care in a plum-coloured coat with a waistcoat

of Spitalfields brocade, on which were figured primroses and columbines in their natural colours, nerve himself to an assurance of dignity. To have displayed confusion then would have been to have let all be lost. He cocked his hat beneath his arm and made a courtly, stiff obeisance.

"Truly, madam," he said, "to what better place could I come to seek for a clue?"

Lady Eshetsford dropped her dark eyes, and meditatively rubbed the edge of her hand-mirror against her lower lip. She murmured, "Hem!" and then, "No, truly, you could have come to no better place."

Long and apprehensive glances passed between Trott and Maria.

"Assuredly I stand in need of help," Mr. Bettsworth said. And he told them of how Sir Francis Dashwood had taken away the portrait. Lady Eshetsford's lips pursed up into a little whistle, but before she could speak Partridge entered the room.

"Madam," he said, "there are three gentlemen of the undertaking persuasion upon the doorstep. One of them is recommended by Doctor Bobus, one by Sir William Ratcliffe, and the other by no one at all—but happening to pass this way, and seeing by the doorstep two of his brothers of the Scutcheon and Hearse, he very nimbly ascended and knocked upon the door."

"Partridge," Lady Eshetsford said, "I will in no way be disturbed either by tradesmen or friends for the rest of this morning."

"Madam," Partridge said, knowing his lady had

a taste for the comic, "I understood that such was the case, but Messrs. Sable and Mowlem are pleased to be very importunate for an interview with your ladyship. For they say that should Sir John have a very long illness, and unfortunately decease at its end, they, or whichever of them your ladyship chooses to perform the obsequies, could save your ladyship a matter of two crowns a day if your ladyship should now commission them instead of waiting till hereafter—the two crowns a day being the fee they would charge for a watcher to wait outside the house and bring news of the decease."

"The unconscionable vultures," Lady Eshetsford said. "Bid the porter whip them from the door."

"Madam," Mr. Partridge said, "this is the mere custom of the trade and trick of the physicians and surgeons and apothecaries. For your ladyship must know that whenever one of these has a patient of distinction as to whose recovery he entertains grave doubts, he confides his misgivings to one of these Sable gentry, receiving in return a handsome honorarium. Then the undertakers set watchers to watch upon the house, and the fee for the watching, as your ladyship has heard, is charged to the relict. But in this case Doctor Bobus and Sir William Ratcliffe, having been called into consultation, had each recommended a different and several undertaker. Now it happened that they met upon the doorstep, and having fallen to fisticuffs upon the point of precedence, the third gentleman, who had dogged the footsteps of one of them, ran pimbly up the steps and was in at the door before the porter could say no."

Lady Eshetsford looked pensively at the ground, and motioned with her hand for Partridge to withdraw.

"Sir John is very ill," Lady Eshetsford said. "Poor brute, I think he will never upset a watch-box again."

"I should not have thought your ladyship would have wept much," Trott, the maid, commented.

"Nor shall I," Lady Eshetsford answered; "but if you have fought with a stalwart foe for a matter of years, surely you will give him the honours of war to the extent of a pensive moment?"

Maria turned her blue eyes upon Mr. Bettsworth's face, and said, with her rather piping intonation—

"Sir John has never held up his head since the baiting you gave him last Thursday as ever was."

"Why, I should be sorry to have been the cause of his death," Mr. Bettsworth said.

"Oh, for sure, your Honour is not the cause of his Worship's death," the maid commented. "Your Honour let his blood and so saved him. Till Friday he was only crestfallen, but it was on Friday that Mr. Jack Williamson, his jackal, came to him and said he would no longer serve as companion to such a lily-livered quake-jaw. From outside the door I heard him speaking in high tones, and Sir John kept silent all the time and stared at his toes, that stuck up through the sheet. And when Mr. Williamson said that he would to all the mohocks of the Town tell the tale of his Worship's cowardice and of the oaths he took,

Sir John groaned once very lamentably and then was silent."

"This Mr. Williamson came into my service on Friday night," Mr. Bettesworth said.

"That was the great grief of Sir John," Lady Eshetsford commented. "I should not much affect your Mr. Williamson."

"Truly, I do not much affect him," Mr. Bettesworth answered, "but I retain him as an example to be avoided. And so Sir John is sick to death of grief?"

"Oh, not of grief!" Lady Eshetsford exclaimed.

"His nurse," the maid said, "fell asleep on Friday night, and Sir John, who had been doped of all liquor, crept downstairs to the cellar, where he knew there was a small anker of brandy. And, as is surmised, bearing this in his arms to stow it under his bed, he fell on the great staircase, and so split his skull where before it had been split by the watchman's pike-stave. So that unless we put it down that his desire for liquor was caused by his grief—which we may in no wise do, since he has not been sober these two years, save last Thursday, that was when he lay abed—your Worship need in no wise consider that Sir John's blood is upon your hands. For if he die, he will die like the Worshipful knight he is, in his own bed."

"Well, I am very glad of it," Mr. Bettesworth said.

Lady Eshetsford considered for a moment. "Touching the portrait . . ." she said. And then, "You, Maria, and you, Trott, go and wait behind the door of my anteroom;" and when, with preternaturally

grave faces, the ward and the maid had disappeared behind a little white door whose handle and furnishings were of chased silver-gilt, she said, with a certain earnestness—

“Mr. Bettesworth, to be frank with you, I know very well who the model for the portrait was; as you know, the painter is a protégé and a tenant of my own, and since—nay, do not deny it!—I have singular cause to be grateful to you, I will, if you wish it, reveal to you this secret.”

Mr. Bettesworth counted forty before he answered, and when he spoke he spoke very slowly. He had been considering what course Lady Eshetsford and all persons of proper spirit would wish him to pursue.

“No,” he said at last. “I do not think—though I have no claim at all upon the gratitude of your ladyship—that I will ask this favour of you. For,” he continued, “if we consider this wager from the moral point of view, it was to be one of some difficulty, and I should run upon equal terms with my competitors. Now, although in the terms of the wager nothing was said as to your ladyship, it was very expressly said that none of us should hold communication with the painter—and that I take to include such other persons as Mr. Hitchcock’s confederates.”

“But,” Lady Eshetsford interrupted, “it cannot be said that Francis Dashwood has not held communication with the painter, since he purchased and subtracted the picture from under your very nose.”

“That, madam,” Mr. Bettesworth retorted, “is a

matter of setting his wit against mine. My own remissness alone let me tell him that I had never seen the portrait; his readiness it was that let him see that if he could purchase and take the portrait away I should be very much at a loss—as indeed I am. I may take it that he has asked no questions of Mr. Hitchcock, so that in that sense he has had no communication with him——”

“In short,” Lady Eshetsford said, “you are determined, quixotically, to have no advantage over any of your rivals.”

“I will have none,” he returned, “save such that God has given me in my parts and wits. Thus, supposing Sir Francis Dashwood or the Duke of Norfolk being hot upon the scent, I should pass their chariot standing in an inn-yard, I would not scruple to remove a lynch-pin, so that a quarter of a mile farther on, their wheel coming off, they should be cast into a ditch and so lose much time. For that I take to be much of a muchness with Sir Francis purchasing the picture. Or, again, since, as I hear, Sir Francis is a very good swordsman, I myself being no indifferent one, I should make no scruple, should he and I both have found the lady, to fight a duel with him, so that either by my proving myself the more skilful of the two I should make progress in the lady’s affections, or by my killing him he should be put out of the way for good.”

“Very strange creatures you men are,” Lady Eshetsford said. “You would rather have a man’s death upon your soul than ask a question from your cousin!”

"Cousin," Mr. Bettsworth said, "the point is not one of such a nicety as should escape one of your ladyship's discernment. For the wager Sir Francis, the Duke, Mr. Simon Harcourt, and myself have set ourselves, is to achieve a feat of no mean difficulty. So that if, fortuitously and by hazard, I have stumbled at the very outset upon a possibility of easy solution, and one which, I take it, is not so open to my competitors, I am determined that I will not take advantage and thus beg the issue."

"And I am not certain," Lady Eshetsford said, "that I do not applaud you for taking this course, though I am sure that any woman would have more sense. But I take it that I would rather have you a foolish but manlike man, than a womanly but cunning and well-advised one."

"Madam," Mr. Bettsworth said, "I hope I shall be able to prove to you that I am not a foolish man, but merely a man of honour. For we have passed our words, all of us, that we will none of us ask questions of this painter."

"But I am not this painter," Lady Eshetsford said.

"Nevertheless, it must be manifest to your ladyship's perspicacity that you and certain members of your family are, as it were, in one corporation with Mr. Hitchcock——"

"God forbid," Lady Eshetsford said, "that I should be put upon a level with the painter!"

"But in this particular matter——" Mr. Bettsworth answered.

"God forbid," she interrupted him again, "that in this particular matter, or in any other matter, I should ever be in any corporation with any

painter, poet, maker of music, or all such beggarly creatures! I have heard of a gentleman or two who have written plays. But a painter—Heaven forbid!”

“This is very much beside the mark,” Mr. Bettesworth said. “The matter in hand——”

“The matter in hand,” she interrupted him, “is neither here nor there. If you will you may kiss my hand and go, for I will not be bombarded with long speeches as to the customs or habits of the animal called man.”

“Madam,” Mr. Bettesworth said, “I foresee that should your husband die I shall very willingly lose this twenty thousand pounds.”

“Sir,” she answered, “I will take to my soul the flattering unction that you would willingly lose a sum of money, but that you should lose a heavy wager laid against so many men—that I do not believe you will find so easy.”

“Madam,” he said, and he raised her hand to his lips, “I have never in my life met one so charming, so——”

“Sir,” she answered him, “I will wager all I possess, and such small sums of my husband’s fortune as he has not dissipated,”—a little malicious smile went round her lips,—“I will wager all that, that if ever you find this lady you will deem her just so charming, and so all the other adjectives in nature as ever you will come to bestow on me. Ay, and you will be just as eager to marry her as ever you could be to marry me.”

“Polly,” Mr. Bettesworth said, and catching her hand he sought to draw her towards him, “you know this lady that I do not, but——”

She laughed, and drew her hand, without any petulance, from his.

"Cousin," she said, "be sure the goods are on the market before you seek to buy. Sir John still lives."

"But give me hope," he answered,

"Oh, hope!" she laughed; "that is a cheap gift. Yet if Sir John have proved a very poor husband to me, it is all the more reason that I practise wifely virtues towards him. In short, I would have you go, that Trott may finish dressing me, and that I may go see that the nurse have not given Sir John sour milk in place of sherry whey and Scotch ale in lieu of tar water."

Outside the large door that opened on to the landing, Mr. Bettsworth had his shoulder touched by Maria Trefusis. "Mr. Bettsworth," she whispered languishingly, "if my aunt have not told you who was the original of 'Celia in her Arbour' I will tell you, so you will but be grateful to me."

"Child," Mr. Bettsworth answered, "that is a matter between your guardian and myself. I do not desire the information." Her eyes followed him despairingly as he went down the broad stone staircase, whose tall walls were decorated with frescoes by Sir Thomas Thornhill. Tall, shiny, and in colours like brown soup and the coppery red of a dim sun seen through a fog, they represented on the one hand Bacchus and Ariadne on a large sofa, and, upon the other, Ariadne deserted and with her hair unbound, waiting, to the strains of the conch, held by a supremely ugly Triton with a long beard.

VII

BETTESWORTH HOUSE was the largest possessed by any commoner in London. It stood in Golden Square, and had been built by Mr. Bettesworth's uncle in the reign of James II. Most of the rooms were very tall and light, but the largest and tallest of the rooms was the banqueting hall, a vast piece whose roof was supported by Ionic marble columns, and whose walls were decorated by marble busts, for the most part purely imaginary, of Bettesworth's ancestors. Thus the Bettesworth who was a judge in the days of Elizabeth bore in his effigy long curls such as had enhanced the beauty of Charles II.

Except on days when there was banqueting, and when long, temporary tables were set up, the floor of this room was bare and tiled; and it was here that Mr. Bettesworth deemed proper to receive the Duke of Norfolk, Sir Francis Dashwood, Mr. Simon Harcourt, and the gentleman in the red coat. This last, it appeared, was a Major Penruddock of the west, who, having served with distinction under King William the Third in the Low Countries, had lately succeeded his elder brother in very considerable estates.

The company arrived in the order that has been

named, the Duke bringing a Mr. Robert Howard ; Sir Francis Dashwood, a Mr. Cecil Dashwood ; and the two others, two gentlemen whose names did not occur in the course of the proceedings. Mr. Bettsworth was supported by Mr. Jack Williamson, whilst his brother, Mr. Roland, sat at a table to write down the minutes. The others disposed themselves rather stiffly upon high-backed chairs that were placed across the hall. The voices echoed in solemn whispers round the walls, and when one of them moved his chair so that its legs squeaked upon the marble tiling, the high sound was repeated hollowly from several points in the room.

His Grace of Norfolk made them a formal speech. He said that they were met upon an occasion that was probably unparalleled in the chronicles of their ancestors. In the first place, the wager was very high ; in the second, it was to be doubted if so many gentlemen of high birth had ever taken part together in such an enterprise,—at any rate since the Dark Ages, when, as fables told them, the Knights of King Arthur's Round Table had set out upon the quest of the mythical and barbarous Holy Grail. It had, therefore, been thought convenient and proper that they should meet together that day to discuss of the terms upon which they would set out upon their search, and the conditions which they would observe.

Conscious that he would speak before a critical audience, the Duke had prepared his speech with great care. He had an agreeable voice ; his manner was composed, and he made graceful gestures with his right hand, his left being supported by a tall

Malacca cane with a great knob of amber for the head.

The undertakings of the various contestants, he said, were well known: Mr. Penruddock had undertaken to find the lady who had served for model to the painter of "Celia in her Arbour"; Mr. Simon Harcourt had wagered that he would fetch her to the dinner of the Dilettante Society; he himself had wagered that he would house and maintain her; Sir Francis Dashwood had wagered that he would marry her if she were of chaste life and good reputation; Mr. Bettsworth had wagered them twenty thousand pounds between them, that he would do all these four things in spite of them all, subject, of course, to Sir Francis Dashwood's proviso concerning the marriageability of the lady.

The Duke looked at Mr. Bettsworth, who, in his capacity of host, sat facing the row of chairs, very stately, his hand supported by a cane even longer than the Duke's, his chestnut wig falling upon his shoulders. As to Mr. Roland Bettsworth, his curls fell on to the paper upon which he wrote down with difficulty as much as he could of the Duke's speech. He was, in the ordinary way, no great penman, and holding his head on one side and low down to the paper, his lips followed carefully each motion of the pen as it scratched forward.

"Mr. Bettsworth," the Duke said, with a sort of formal deference, "we may take it that should the lady not prove eligible for marriage—either because of irregularities in her former life or because of the fact that she is already married—we may take it that although that part of the wager is null and

void the fact shall not of necessity void the other portions of the wager?"

"I fail, your Grace," Mr. Bettesworth said, "to see how the occasion could arise. Before the lady could be married she must be at first, at the very least, found and fetched, and if I fail in either of these particulars I shall have failed in the whole wager. Whereas if I succeed in them, the marriage coming at the last, it shall be open to me either to marry her, or, in the event of my deeming her not marriageable, I shall be content to lay the matter before this company to decide whether my aversion from her be warrantable under the terms of the wager." •

"You are aware, Mr. Bettesworth," the Duke asked, "that if you ask this company to decide in your favour you will be asking us to declare that we shall lose each this wager and a large sum of money?"

"I am aware of it," Mr. Bettesworth said, "and am content to rely upon your honourable decisions."

The Duke turned his curls round to look at the assembly. He uttered a dubious "Hum!" and Mr. Roland Bettesworth tittered above his writing.

"The terms of this wager are very singular," the Duke continued contemplatively. "Thus Mr. Penruddock," and he bowed ceremoniously to the composed man in the red coat, who wore his own red hair powdered and tied in a knot behind,— "Mr. Penruddock has wagered Mr. Simon Harcourt a thousand pounds that he will find this lady. Now, if he loses, he will lose this thousand pounds to Mr. Penruddock. But if Mr. Bettesworth fail in any one particular, Mr. Penruddock, though he have

failed to find the lady, will nevertheless win five thousand pounds of Mr. Bettesworth, and thus be four thousand pounds in pocket. Mr. Simon Harcourt, on the other hand, has betted myself two thousand pounds that he will fetch the lady. If he fail in this he will have lost two thousand pounds to me. But supposing Mr. Penruddock to have found the lady, Mr. Bettesworth must therefore of necessity have failed ; thus Mr. Harcourt will have lost three thousand pounds to myself and Mr. Penruddock, whilst he will win five thousand pounds from Mr. Bettesworth, being thus——”

The Duke was musing on very agreeably to himself when Sir Francis Dashwood said—

“My Lord Duke, there are many questions to be asked, and I think most of us is scholar enough to make these calculations for himself, or if he cannot the results themselves will enlighten him.”

The Duke ceased his musings with some dignity.

“What questions does Sir Francis desire to ask ?” he said.

“In the first place,” Sir Francis answered, with his devious and ironic smile, “touching the article of fetching the lady. How are we to understand that this is to be carried out ?”

Mr. Bettesworth answered that he would fetch the lady from the place where he should find her and let her sit in the chair next the President where the painter had sat—subject to the proviso that the Society should be willing to receive her.

Mr. Simon Harcourt said : “Agreed to that ; that the lady’s assent to sitting at the dinner shall

be deemed equivalent to her sitting there, for I think the rules of the Society will not permit of petticoats at the board."

"And next," Mr Penruddock said, from the farthest seat in the hall, "as to the term to be set upon this adventure?"

"Oh, it shall not be a very long space," the Duke of Norfolk said languidly. "For my part, I would not have it be a term in years, for it would not be to my taste to have—if I succeed—the housing of a toothless hag."

"And touching the word 'housing,' Mr. Bettesworth?" Sir Francis asked. The delicate fringes on his eyelids quivered, for he was about to utter an impertinence. "Are we to take it that this lady must be your mistress before you marry her?" Mr. Bettesworth flushed hotly but did not speak.

"Oh, come," the Duke of Norfolk said, "a gentleman cannot marry his mistress;" and Mr. Penruddock uttered a loud, "No! no!"

Mr. Bettesworth remained perfectly silent. Sir Francis retained the smile about the corners of his lips. Mr. Roland Bettesworth whispered to Mr. Jack Williamson, who was close beside him, "I think my brother will fly at Dashwood's throat. Get between them."

Most of the other gentlemen leaned forward, their lips slightly parted, and the Duke of Norfolk toyed with the tassels of his cane. At last Mr. Bettesworth spoke with a cold formality, his eyes remained fixed upon Sir Francis, but he spoke to the rest of the company—

"Gentlemen, if in the course of this adventure there should arise between any two of the parties an occasion for an affair of honour, and one gentleman should slay or seriously injure the other, what shall be the agreement?"

Mr. Roland Bettesworth turned, with his arm over the back of his chair—

"Oh!" he said, "the case of death is provided for. In the customary usage it voids all wagers, but in the case of disablement . . ."

Mr. Simon Harcourt, a dark-featured, placid man, with cunning eyes, a blue coat without much gold lace, a hooked nose and a rather short wig, leaned back in his chair with his legs crossed. He asked, somewhat as a barrister will ask the opinions of a judge, slightly closing his eyes, and very much at his ease—

"What would Mr. Bettesworth propose in the case of disablement?"

"Oh, in the case of disablement," Mr. Bettesworth said, with a rather haughty disdain, "we must always undertake to abstain from pursuit for the period that the poor devil shall lie abed, that period of extension to be added to the time allotted to the pursuit."

Sir Francis whispered to his brother Cecil, "By God! it will come to swords between this man and me."

"Then," his brother answered, "you had better give him little occasion for some months to come or I shall step into the title. And do you practise diligently, or take lessons from Stechetti, in the interim, for though this man has been in London

scarcely a week, he has already killed Sir John Eshetsford."

"Eshetsford! Eshetsford!" Sir Francis mused. "By God, Eshetsford!"

"I hear," his brother continued, "that Mr. Bettsworth run him through the bowels after a furious fight lasting thirty-five minutes, Sir John having taken him *in flagrante* with my lady."

"Then, by God!" Sir Francis said, "we have lost our twenty thousand pounds to Mr. Bettsworth."

One of Mr. Bettsworth's lackeys, in a green suit with a bouquet of white roses at his breast, came deferentially up the hall behind the pillars, bearing under his left arm a square, flat package in green baize, and in his right hand a small note. He approached Mr. Bettsworth from behind, and said that the note was very urgent. Mr. Bettsworth opened it and read—

"My aunt begs me to write to you that it is not expected Sir John can live another half-hour. As you cannot go on with your assembly after his death, but must prorogue it, she bids me send you this, that may aid you in your deliberations. It is what we sought for vainly the other night. If you have any commands for me, I am not your odious brother's but thine,

MARIA "

Mr. Bettsworth slowly withdrew from its green baize coverings the stretched cloth of a picture. It showed the overhanging branch of a tree with leaves rather brown but very umbrageous. Upon a green and mossy bank there sat a maiden in a white

flowered gown ; her very high waist was tied with broad pink ribbons that fell into her lap. An empty basket lay at her feet, her wide straw hat was slung from her arm by more pink ribbons, her dark brown hair, in a somewhat studied disorder, was loosely coiled in a knot at the crown of her head, and one escaped tress fell down her cheek on to her bosom. But Mr. Bettsworth, at the very moment that he uttered an expression of delight uttered one also of dismay. The outline of the face was a clean, clear oval, but the contents a blank of white canvas. There were no features, there were no pencillings of eyebrows, there were no lips, and the blankness seemed stony and obdurate. The painter, after having made his picture of inanimate objects, must have transferred them into a larger canvas, omitting to limn his sitter's features, perhaps because she had not much time in which to be at his disposal. Mr. Bettsworth reflected, as was his wont, and then slowly he turned the canvas round to the audience that was before him.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is all of 'Celia in her Arbour' that we are like to see. I will give you the equal privilege with myself."

There arose from the audience many queries, such as: "How now, what does this mean? Can we not go see the picture when we will? This is a hoax! Have you scraped the features a-purpose?"

Sir Francis Dashwood stood up from his seat and, facing them all, took with deliberation a pinch of snuff, coolly shaking out his lace ruffles.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Mr. Bettsworth knows what I think none of you know, that I have stolen a march upon you all. This morning I purchased

the picture of 'Celia in her Arbour'; it is now in my strong-room, and neither Mr. Bettsworth nor any one of you shall see it again till our search is ended. Mr. Bettsworth sought to make himself my equal in the matter, but you see he has been frustrated."

The Duke of Norfolk leaned forward in his chair and looked at the ground seriously. Mr. Simon Harcourt threw himself back, called out: "A catch! A catch!" and laughed uproariously. Mr. Penruddock rose cholericly from his chair, but the Duke said negligently—

"This is a small matter. We can all of us remember very well those features." He screwed up his eyes with the air of a connoisseur and gazed at the blank space on the canvas. "That is misleading," he said. "In the picture the face is much more round."

"No, no; it was longer, for sure," Mr. Simon Harcourt said, "and the tresses were much more black."

"I am certain they could not have been more black," Mr. Penruddock said. "On the contrary, they had on them the glow of burnished gold; black tresses could not go with the blue eyes that the picture had."

"But the eyes of the picture were between grey and brown," Mr. Simon Harcourt called out. "I am certain of that, for I remarked to Lady Deepcastle that the eyes were the very spit of her own."

"But my Lady Deepcastle's eyes are as sloes, a jetty black," the gentleman said who had come with

Mr. Penruddock, "She is Cornish like us: all Cornish eyes are black."

"No," Mr. Penruddock said, "some of them, like my own, are a deep blue; and the eyes of the portrait were blue."

"At any rate," Mr. Robert Howard said from behind the Duke of Norfolk, "we can be agreed upon it that the nose was a trifle crooked, for his Grace, with his exquisite taste, remarked upon it when he saw the picture."

"His Grace's taste is too exquisite," Mr. Simon Harcourt laughed, "for I will swear that it was the straightest nose that ever I saw, and slightly tilted at the point."

"No, by God!" Mr. Penruddock called out, "the nose was markedly aquiline. I remarked it at the time, for it was the sole defect of the picture."

They had all crowded round the cloth which Mr. Bettesworth held before him, resting the top of it beneath his chin. An old servant in the livery of the Eshetsfords advanced slowly behind their backs and up the hall; the tears were streaming down his wrinkled face.

"Gentlemen," he said, "my master, Sir John, died at five minutes past the hour in a godly manner, praying forgiveness from all whom he had injured."

PART II

I

IT was fully ten days later, towards seven, on a very wet evening, that Mr. Bettesworth and his small company of riders dropped their reins on their horses' necks in the inn-yard at Ashford. The performance of Sir John's obsequies, in which, being Lady Eshetsford's nearest male relative, he had performed such important duties as deciding where the scutcheons should be hung on the front of the house, holding the principal cords of the coffin-cloth, and making a compact with Sir John's heir for the hiring of the house by Lady Eshetsford, had so long delayed him. Sir John's heir, his nephew and the fifth baronet, was a poor man from Acryse in Kent, and it appeared likely that when the tangle of Sir John's affairs should be unravelled there would be little or nothing for Sir Thomas. Indeed, the Manor of Ashford, which had once been Sir John's, had passed into his lady's hands as against money advanced by her to him, and it was certain that Ashford House in London would have gone the same road but for Sir John's demise.

The Manor of Ashford and Ashford House itself were so much to Lady Eshetsford's taste that,

possessing the one, she very much desired to pass her widowhood in the other. Thus, after bargaining spread over three days, it had been decided that until the house could be inventoried, valued, and the affairs of Sir John unravelled, Lady Eshetsford should continue to dwell there as Sir Thomas's tenant; and in the meantime, for the period of her strict seclusion, Mr. Bettsworth put at her disposal his own house at Winterbourne Longa. And it was not until he had seen her set off in her coach drawn by eight horses, attended by twelve armed servants, that Mr. Bettsworth had permitted himself to set about the very urgent business of pursuing his search for the fair unknown.

To Lady Eshetsford, in the shrouded anteroom, where she waited for her coach to draw up to the door, he had said, with a tremor of passion in his voice—

"Bid me abandon this search, which is a folly undertaken upon a too sudden impulse;" but, hooded all round, her face in deep black, and with her travelling mask in her hand ready to put on, she laughed at him ironically.

"Sir," she said, "you did not, as you should have, count forty before you made this wager, and now you would, without counting forty, abandon it upon a too sudden impulse."

"Madam," Mr. Bettsworth said, "it is conceded between us that this wager is a folly."

"Sir," she answered, "it is not conceded between us that this wager is a folly, but if it were——"

"Madam, it is a folly," Mr. Bettsworth said. "And I am certain that if the Signora Poppæa had

been with me here in this Town she would not have let me fall into it. And having recognised its folly it would be in me a renewal of the folly to continue in it when I so much more desire——”

“Cousin,” Lady Eshetsford said, “the Signora Poppæa might have prevented you from laying this wager, but for my part I would have urged you to it, for I think it is one very proper for a gentleman to have made; and I am very certain (I am as certain of this as that death shall follow life) that if upon better acquaintance you shall make me the offer of your hand, I will not accept the offer until you shall have found the original of this picture. For certainly you shall taste and try before you buy. And I tell you that this lady will prove in every way my equal, whether in graces, in accomplishments, in stature, or in eligibility of marriage. If I did not know that this was so, surely I would be the first to bid you abandon this search; but I am certain that she will be every bit as much to your taste as I. In short, I will not marry you till you have found her.”

Mr. Bettesworth said—

“Madam, you have said, ‘If upon better acquaintance I will make you the offer of my hand.’ Madam, here, now, and without more acquaintance I make you that offer.”

“Sir,” Lady Eshetsford said, “I think it was the Signora Poppæa who enjoined upon you that at any crucial moment of your life before speaking you should count forty.”

Mr. Bettesworth said—

“Oh! from whom have you heard that?”

She smiled her mocking smile—

"Perhaps it was from your brother Roland," she answered, "or perhaps from the Signora Poppæa."

"You have been in communication with the Signora?" he asked.

"How," she answered, "should one take up one's quarters with a body of servants in a house that a lady reigns over and not be in communication with that lady? And how, since that lady's chief occupation of mind is with you, should she not communicate about you?"

For a moment Mr. Bettsworth had a sense of dismay at the thought that these women, who were both potent, mysterious, and inscrutable, should lay their heads together to influence his destiny, but he stiffened his back and said—

"Madam, I have had the honour to offer you my hand."

"And, sir," she said, "I have had the honour to point out to you that before making me that offer you have not counted to that number of forty."

"But this is folly," he said.

"It is the only condition upon which I will listen to you," she laughed.

Mr. Bettsworth swallowed in his throat, and then, accepting the inevitable, he stood in silence, his lips moving. From the street there began a prodigious clatter of hoofs and of wheels—

"You are too late," Lady Eshetsford said. "My coach is at the door."

She smoothed down her skirt, set her visor to her face, and was moving towards the entry.

He caught her with great violence in his arms,

and, pulling down the mask, he covered her face with burning kisses. She forced herself gently free after a decent interval.

"Sir," she said, "before committing that action too, you should have counted forty."

He followed her towards the door, half stretching out his arms, with an ineffectual gesture, protesting that he hoped he had not ruined his cause by his too great passion.

"Sir," she said, "before venturing that too, should you not have counted forty?"

She affixed her mask to her face, so that she appeared rather grim and sibylline.

"Sir," she said, "if you desire to win me—although it is too much flattery, but I must needs believe it since you say so—the way to do it is to persevere in this search."

"You would imply," he said, "that to abstain would be to show a want of courage and perseverance. You would have me acquit myself like a man."

"Why, there is that, too," she said, "but there are sundry reasons."

Her coach before the door was of green picked out in gold. It was covered with packages to the very roof, and the large springs behind were hung with hampers of food. She took with her two cooks, and eight armed horsemen who bore portmanteaux before and behind their saddles; two led horses bore her bedding, so that she and Maria might sleep in the coach if the inns on the road proved not to her liking; but the silver housings had been removed

from the furniture of her horses because she was in mourning, and the hammer-cloths were all of black. Trott, the maid, sat already in the coach; Maria had gone down the steps, avoiding the importunities of Mr. Roland, who had been superintending the stowing of the packages, and without another word spoken Lady Eshetsford disappeared into the body, the door being held open and closed by Mr. Jack Williamson. With a prodigious clatter upon the cobbles, with shouts from postilions and a great cracking of the bewigged driver's whip, the coach, heaving and swaying its shoulders, got into a processional motion.

Mr. Bettesworth and his brother remained upon the steps, motionless, their hats in their hands; but when the coach, turning the corner, displayed the white face of Maria Trefusis leaning forward, Mr. Williamson raised the triangle of his hat high above his head and uttered shrill cheers. Beneath his chagrin Mr. Bettesworth noted that it was ill-mannered and gross to cheer the departing. He drew his heels smartly together, clapped on his hat, that let out a cloud of powder from his hair, and said—

“Gentlemen, we set out for Ashford this afternoon. We will lie to-night at Blackheath.”

"BY God!" Mr. Simon Harcourt burst into the ordinary room to say to Mr. Penruddock, "he has come down with a posse, with a whole army of men."

Mr. Penruddock was walking up and down the long, dim room. The dusk had fallen, the rain pattered on the widow-panes. Over each of the four dark doorways a stag's head branched its shadowy horns up towards the shadowy ceiling. In the centre of a very long table were set a couple of bottles of claret, a couple of glasses, a couple of packs of cards. Above them a three-branched candlestick of plate sent out feeble rays into the obscurity. Their researches for the day being over, Major Penruddock and Mr. Harcourt had been minded to pass the rainy evening over the green cloth; and later, with a pair of foils.

"He? Who?" Mr. Penruddock asked. "His little Grace of Norfolk?"

"No, neither my cousin Norfolk nor yet Sir Francis, but Bettsworth. I have seen him get down from his horse. I think we shall be discomfited."

But whereas Mr. Harcourt was cunning, Mr. Penruddock was composed, having learned self-

possession in the course of polite but tedious campaigns in the Low Countries.

"Why," he said, "I think I would rather have him near us than far away." He sat down at the table, poured out a glass of wine, smelt it, held it to the light, drank it, set his elbows on the green cloth and his chin upon his hands. "Now, let us hold a council of war," he said. "This is a matter of no small complication." He motioned with his hand for Mr. Harcourt to sit opposite him, and whilst that gentleman walked round the table, a long distance, sending the shadow of his wig travelling all round the dim walls, Mr. Penruddock, in full candlelight, took a pack in his hands and began searching them leisurely for the Court cards. He laid the four kings before him, and tapped them with a long finger-nail.

"Now observe," he said, "this affair is a very complicated one; it will be all the better for a demonstration. In this matter there are four of us. Let us say that I, who am the ruddiest of all, am the king of hearts; now let us say that you, who are dark and roundish, are the king of clubs. Now in this particular quest of ours you and I are fast foes, for I have wagered that I will find our Celia, you wagering that I shall not. Here, now, is the king of spades; let him represent the Duke of Norfolk, who is dark and spare. Between his thin Grace and myself there is no essential hostility at all. For I am to find the lady and his Grace is to house her; and since, before she is found she cannot be housed, I can very properly aid his Grace. You, on the other hand, are the fast foe of his Grace as well as of myself, for you have betted Norfolk that

you will, and he that you will not, fetch this lady to London. You, on the other hand, may well be friendly with Sir Francis Dashwood—for Sir Francis has wagered only that he will marry her, and your bringing her to Town will aid and in no way impede his design. Therefore—” and Major Penruddock took the four Court cards up again—“the king of hearts, myself, and the king of spades, being his Grace of Norfolk, are united by our several and common interests into one quarrel against the king of clubs, which is you, and the king of diamonds, whom we will style Sir Francis Dashwood—though Sir Francis is not fair enough to be a diamond man. Now——” and Mr. Penruddock poured out another glass of claret, drank it slowly, and surveyed with contentment the two pairs of cards.

“Oh, well made plan, man of camps and marches,” Mr. Harcourt laughed; “but so much had made itself manifest even to my intelligence. Is it not known to both of us that in this game I play not only my own hand, but represent also Sir Francis; and do you not hold an actual commission to watch events for the Duke of Norfolk? But the point is that here is come Mr. Bettsworth, with an immense army of men, ready to scour the whole country-side, where you and I have been kicking our heels with no achievement more than the bedevilling of a few serving-wenchies.”

In the course of his leisurely search of the pack Major Penruddock had come upon the ace of spades. He laid it down upon the table before him and surveyed it solemnly.

"Why, we have achieved more than that," he said.
"Let us survey the whole situation."

Mr. Harcourt threw himself back in his chair; his waistcoat was unbuttoned, and the tails of his coat drooped upon the sanded floor.

"Oh, la!" he said, "you are for ever reviewing the situation. This is the sixteenth time you have reviewed it in the sennight that we have been here."

Mr. Penruddock gazed obdurately at the card beneath his nose.

"It is a habit pursued by all cautious gentlemen," he said. "It aids my mind to perceive the new aspects of things and it avoids haste."

"Certainly it avoids haste," Mr. Harcourt said; "for we have done nothing, and I am sick to death of this mouldering hole."

"My friend," the Major said, with a slightly grim imperturbability, "it was not I who desired you to dog my footsteps. I discovered for myself, from the woman who kept his lodgings, that Mr. Hitchcock paints all his set pieces here in Ashford, painting portraits only in London Town."

"Major," Mr. Harcourt said, "if you discovered it, so did all of us. For each of us bribed the woman who keeps Hitchcock's lodgings; and so, no doubt, this Bettsworth has done. It called for no uncommon sagacity."

"Nevertheless," the Major answered, "I was the first upon the field, and you have dogged my footsteps in a manner that no man less patient would have suffered. And what we have discovered so far I have discovered."

"But I was always at your back and heard your questions," Mr. Harcourt laughed.

The Major leaned half across the table.

"Sir, I am a patient man," he said; "that, I think, is an approved fact. But, nevertheless, the time has come to review the situation."

Mr. Harcourt gave a loud groan. "Oh, you will be at it," he said.

"Sir," the Major repeated formally, "if I do not give myself that pleasure I shall give myself the pleasure of running you through the waistcoat."

Mr. Harcourt leaned back in his chair, quite motionless. "Oh, then, hold your review," he said. "I had rather you did that than that I should see my vitals decorating the floor."

The Major hemmed with grim satisfaction. "It is well that that is determined," he said. "Now, attend." He pitched the ace of spades on to Mr. Harcourt's black satin breeches. "This ace of spades shall stand for Mr. Bettsworth. Now, though the four kings are divided into two parties, yet, as against the ace, they are all united. Now, Mr. Harcourt,"—the Major pointed a stiff forefinger at Mr. Harcourt's waistcoat, as if to remind him that there the blade would go in,—“since this is a matter of combined motion I will take it upon me—for I have had practice in directing operations—to be your commander in this matter. Imprimis, you shall no longer follow me about, for I am not of a mind to let you be hostile to me. On the contrary, you shall transfer your hostility to Mr. Bettsworth and shall follow his operations.

•Mr. Harcourt held his head on one side.

"Gadzooks!" he said, "will you transfer me to a plaguy, ruffling swashbuckler, who kills his man a week and goes ringed round with bullies? This is the merest inhumanity."

"If it would be more humane to dispatch you myself," Mr. Penruddock said, "you have your choice."

Mr. Harcourt played with one of his ringlets. "Well, it is a choice," he said ironically.

The Major tapped the tablecloth with his nail. "It is manifest," he said, "nay, it is even in a manner egregious, that by that very pleasure of your company which has saved you hitherto from affairs of the sword you will be enabled to save yourself from any rough encounter with Mr. Bettesworth. But that is your affair. Mine is that you should take your orders from me as your commander. And this you may do the more readily since thus you will be working for the good of us all."

Mr. Harcourt grimaced slightly. Being small, round, of a full habit of body, and with no reach in the arm, he was one of those men who by adroitness of tongue, ready apologies, and by one or two definite exhibitions of the white feather, had hitherto avoided any duel; whilst his distinguished position at Court, his considerable wealth, and the amount of patronage he had at his disposal had prevented his incurring any serious obloquy.

"Sir," he said, with a mixture of effrontery and of self-contempt, "as a member of His Majesty's Privy Council, I take precedence and rank before a general. But since I am very convinced that your command-ship will prosper the affairs of our small army, I

place myself willingly in your hands. What are your commands?"

Major Penruddock began to speak with a conciseness that had in it a touch of ferocity—

"Hitherto you have attached yourself to my person. What precisely your motive may have been I shall not stay to inquire. For it is obvious that since I have come upon traces of this lady you cannot very well prevent my finding her, and thus losing your bet. Perhaps, however, your intention was to stab me in the back, or to rid yourself of me by some hired bully when I had found, or all but found, her."

The Major squared his shoulders and looked at Mr. Harcourt. Mr. Harcourt brushed his knee, with an elegant wave of his ruffled hand.

"You will not, I presume," he said, "immediately proceed to my execution if by pleading 'not guilty' to this intention I seem to decry the excellence of your deductions. But you should give me credit for the sense to know that one does not with immense ease disembarass oneself of a swordsman as skilful or of one so determined as yourself. So that such a motive was no part of my scheme."

The Major grunted with martial satisfaction.

"My scheme, in short, was very simple," Mr. Harcourt continued. "It was no more than to follow you till you found my lady Celia, if possible to get before you,—but in any case to use such seductions as I possessed in order to the carrying of her off to the Town. But as a man of peace, and a gold-stick in waiting upon His Majesty, I could not allow violence to form any part of my schemes."

"His Majesty is well served if there is no danger of strife," the Major said; "and I am glad, for Mr. Bettesworth's sake, that your disposition is not more formidable—for my orders are that you attend upon Mr. Bettesworth with the same assiduity, and in the same intention, as you have hitherto bestowed upon me; with this proviso, that you shall report to me every step that Mr. Bettesworth makes towards discovery, and that in case he should find the lady with any sudden expedition you shall send, hot-foot, a messenger to find me."

"But," Mr. Harcourt said, "if the discovery be already made it shall be too late for your purpose, and you will have lost your wager."

"Not so," Major Penruddock answered, "for I wagered only to find her, not to be the first that should do so. So that if I come upon her in Mr. Bettesworth's arms you will pay me one thousand pounds."

Mr. Harcourt's eyebrows went up and his mouth down.

"But it is implied in the terms of the wager that you should be the first to make the discovery, otherwise you would win in any case, and without effort. Why, it would be sufficient supposing you should meet her walking in the Mall after she has married Sir Francis, and is patent to all the world."

"Sir," the Major said, "I shall certainly win in any case, and that meeting will be sufficient. In all the meetings we have had, if you will give yourself the trouble to read the minutes of them, you shall not make the discovery of any word of

first finding. Of all this company of adventurers I am the only one that cannot lose, for if I meet her in the Park, or wear a favour at her wedding, I win the thousand pounds of you. If we all of us fail to find her, I lose, it is true, a thousand pounds to you. But I win five thousand from Mr. Bettesworth."

Mr. Harcourt looked at Major Penruddock with his mouth open.

"And it was you who designed this wager," he said.

"Surely it was I who designed this wager," the Major said. "I have, you see, gained some skill in these things by my experience in the wars, which taught me the trick of reviewing the situation."

Mr. Harcourt rose from his chair and, bowing ceremoniously to the Major, said, with his hand over his heart—

"Sir, in future I will go to school to you, and I hold the lesson that I have learnt cheap at the thousand pounds that I hope to have the honour of paying you."

The Major rose, and ceremoniously returned his interlocutor's salute.

"Sir," he said, "I trust that now it is apparent to your senses that our interests are the same, and that you will join with me in prosecuting this search. We may leave to Mr. Bettesworth as much as we will of the labour of finding the lady, and when that is accomplished I will set about aiding you to wrest her from him, which will enable you to take her up to London. This, you perceive, will be to my interest, since, by precluding Mr. Bettes-

worth from performing that function, he will lose the whole of his wager."

Mr. Harcourt struck his heels smartly together.

"Major," he said, "with your aid promised I feel that I have the Duke of Norfolk's guineas already in my pocket, clinking harmoniously alongside of Mr. Bettesworth's."

The voice of Mr. Jack Williamson, loud and elated, burst upon them, and the fat host, bearing before him two flickering candles in plated sticks, preceded Mr. Bettesworth's party into the room.

"Ho, bully boys, bully boys!" Mr. Williamson exclaimed. "Now shall we eat rich and rare." He gave a standing leap on to the long table, and stood brandishing his whip above his head. "Ha!" he said to Mr. Bettesworth and Mr. Roland, who followed him into the room, "neither of you could do that after our long ride. You are as stiff when you get down from your beasts as a French soldier after a night in a ditch."

"I hope I shall be preserved from doing it before the rest of the company," Mr. Bettesworth said coldly.

"Ho, company! Damn company!" Mr. Williamson answered. "It's a poor heart and a poor company that will keep a man from rejoicing."

In the dim light Mr. Bettersworth had failed to recognise the occupants of the other end of the room, but Mr. Penruddock came up from the other side of the table.

"Why, Squire," he said, "have you come to set at naught all our efforts? As the man in the play says: 'We are like the poor badger who, having

with great labour scratched his earth, presently comes the fox and drives him out of it.' "

"Stinks him out of it," Mr. Bettesworth corrected him; "that is what the man in the play says. But I hope I shall so little stink you out of this place that you will be pleasuring me with your company at supper, and that soon. For I intend to lie this night at my cousin's."

"There we may felicitate you," Mr. Harcourt said, "for this is a foul and stinking place to lie in. I wish the devil had all inn-keepers by the legs!"

III

THEY were supping, upon the whole, pleasantly and harmoniously, save that Mr. Jack Williamson had too great an itch to sing. Worn as he was with a week of solitude in the companionship of the too austere Major Penruddock, Mr. Harcourt welcomed with great cheer the companionship of Roland Bettesworth, who brought down the latest talk of the Town. Nay, upon the news that old Lord Sauchiburn, being at that date sixty-nine, had been inveigled into making a marriage with Betty Frisk when he was drunk overnight, and had gone nearly mad with vexation on the morrow morning—at this gloriously mirth-making news Mr. Harcourt threw his arms round Mr. Roland's neck and kissed him upon both cheeks. Major Penruddock and Mr. Bettesworth, upon the other hand, felt pleasure in discoursing on their estates, for they were both new land-owners and had schemes,—Mr. Bettesworth for improving the appearance of Winterbourne by planting shade trees which he would have in groves, and Mr. Penruddock for enlarging the profits of his home-farm by feeding his sheep upon a root called the neep, or turnip, which he had found in the Low Countries. They were thus in a pleasant frame of mind, only

Mr. Williamson being driven, by comparative neglect, to troll portions of ballads from *The Island Princess*, an opera which was then all the talk of the Town, when Mr. Bettesworth was interrupted by a whisper in his ear from the serving-man whom he had sent to announce that that night he would lie at Ashford Manor-house. It had been a wet journey, and the rain dripped from the servant's black cloak on to the floor. Mr. Bettesworth's face expressed anger and cold disgust. He said aloud—

"Bid her ladyship's steward attend me here."

There came in a very large, pompous, and solid man of perhaps fifty, dressed all in black, and his figure protruding far in front of his backbone as a very full sail before the mast.

"You tell me, Mr. Steward," Mr. Bettesworth said, "that you have received no letter from Lady Eshetsford to announce my arrival and bid you attend to my comfort?"

The steward bowed himself as supply as his large stature would allow.

"Your Worship," he said, "I have hitherto received no letter. Doubtless to-morrow it will arrive."

Standing very erect and haughty, with his back to the lights and to his own silver on the tablecloth, Mr. Bettesworth took from his breast-pocket a letter which Lady Eshetsford had written very hastily before her departure in the coach—

"On your life, Chuckel, see that not a crease is in the bedclothing of my cousins, and entreat them as if they were the King and his brother." It was signed "M^r E.," and Mr. Bettesworth had retained it because

it was the first scrap of her handwriting that he had held. He surrendered it, therefore, with some displeasure into Mr. Chuckel's hands, for it seemed to him disagreeable that her handwriting, having about it, as it were, some of the savour of her personality, should be touched by or fall under the eyes of this person of mean extraction, of dull intelligence, and of pomposity of manner.

"Sir," he said, "this should be sufficient to allay any suspicions you may have formed; if, indeed, my port and presence have not been sufficient to remove them."

Mr. Chuckel's face was normally of an extreme and pallid whiteness, resembling nothing so much as boiled rice. He wore, moreover, his own hair, which was as white as if it had been bleached, though he could not have been much turned of forty-five. To his cautious face his agate blue eyes, with a touch of a cast, formed a centre of vivid colour, of a slight savour of treachery and of mistrustfulness. They seemed, indeed, to wander over the assembly whilst his mind took in the significance of the letter.

"Your Worship," he said in a peculiar falsetto voice, that lapsed into gruffness at unexpected moments, "if your Worship be indeed her ladyship's cousin——"

"If!" Mr. Bettesworth exclaimed haughtily.

Mr. Chuckel inclined himself deprecatingly, and extended one very fat, white hand, upon which a large ring of opaque red stone made a point of colour. His eyes glanced for an instant at Mr. Bettesworth, who, very erect, extremely fair, with a high colour caused by riding in the rain, and

very haughty, kept, from his blue eyes, a darkling glance fixed upon the steward.

"Your Worship," Mr. Chuckel said, "God forbid that one in my station should hinder and trouble one of so great a name as Mr. Bettsworth. To that end your Worship will do me justice to observe that I have hastened to throw myself at your Worship's feet; and I trust, confidently, that your Worship will do me the other justice to remember that, inasmuch as a very great trust is placed in me, thus a reasonable measure of caution should by myself be displayed. I pray you to commend me for this to her ladyship upon the occasion of your next meeting."

"Mr. Chuckel," Mr. Bettsworth said, "I shall speak of you as I find you on better acquaintance; for you will understand that I am come here, amongst other things, to bid you render some account of your stewardship during the last year."

Mr. Chuckel's blue eyes, with a slight cast in them, winced very appreciably.

"But, sir," Mr. Bettsworth continued, "I make no doubt that you have very honourably discharged your trust; and certainly you are to be commended for having thus displayed a caution in my reception, for which I bear you no grudge. So that I beg you will do me the favour to drink a glass of wine with my master of the horse, whom you will find in another room; and that you will then return to the Manor-house to make fitting preparations for myself and my companions to-morrow, for to-night I think it is already too late for you to do this without

inconvenience. So, commending you to my servants, who will inform you of the things which I am the most likely to need, I have the honour to wish you a very good-night."

"Your Worship," Mr. Chuckel said, "I am your Worship's very humble and obedient servant, and I would like your Worship to understand with what pleasure I anticipate your coming to-morrow, and with what trustfulness your presence has inspired me, when I point out that I shall surrender, without scruple, the keys of my charge; though, to be sure, the letter which your Worship has done me the honour to place in my hand speaks merely of her ladyship's cousins, and affords no mark of identification of your Worship as a cousin."

Mr. Harcourt at this moment blurted out—

"Oh, as for that——" But the Major touched him suddenly on his arm, without, however, uttering any words.

Mr. Bettesworth, having his back to Mr. Harcourt, did not observe the interruption; but, with his eyes on the two gentlemen who were facing him on the farther side of the table, Mr. Chuckel continued—

"I say this merely that your Worship, commending me for having shown caution in the first part, shall not discommend me for the lack of it in the sequel. For, to tell the truth, one has only to look at your Worship's open countenance, high carriage, and reserved demeanour——"

"Friend Chuckel," Mr. Bettesworth said, "to accuse you of lack of caution after you have seen me would be to decry my own looks. Prithee, begone, and let me set about the finishing of my

supper. Your compliments are very windy fare to an empty stomach."

Mr. Chuckel withdrew with a soft and sliding step which was remarkable in one of his proportions.

"Why, the fellow should be a dancing-master," Mr. Williamson exclaimed before Mr. Chuckel was out of earshot.

IV

ASHFORD MANOR-HOUSE presented a heavy and overpowering front of grey stone, with a cupola, a very heavy stone cornice, heavy flat pillars being let into the wall between the three stories of square windows. A very broad flight of stone steps led down from a portico as tall as the porch of Ashford Church, descending the terrace by a gentle slope that, for the rest of its extent, was covered with lawn grass, on to a semicircular stretch of lawn that had the radius of the long front of the house itself. Three avenues of chestnut radiated from this lawn, going out into the distance towards the Romney Marsh, and along the balustrade of the terrace were set at intervals stone vases alternating with stone cupids. This front of the house had been built comparatively lately—that is to say, in the youth of Sir John Vanbrugh, the architect who wrote the monstrously appreciated play called *The Provoked Wife*. Sir John Brute, indeed, the husband of the Provoked Wife, was said by the Town to have been drawn from Lady Eshetsford's husband. And a certain verity was apparent in this rumour in that, during the reconstruction of Ashford Manor-house, Mr. Vanbrugh had been, of necessity, much with the family of Sir John.¹ On

the other hand, Sir John had been married to Lady Eshetsford but four years, whilst the front of the Manor-house was already fourteen years old. But then, *The Provoked Wife* was first produced nine months after Sir John's death.

Mr. Vanbrugh's heavy hand had converted the old building—it had been erected by Francis Eshetsford, the founder of the family, a notorious informer, diplomat, and spoiler of monasteries of Henry VIII's time—had converted the old, long, low brick front into the heavy pile of stone that now, like a cliff, confronted the fresh May sun. But Mr. Vanbrugh's achievement, the Eshetsford money beginning to feel a strain shortly after the accession of the late Sir John, had stopped short before it reached the very considerable rear of the building. This had been added to the oldest portion of the house by Philip Eshetsford, who had materially aided Lord Burleigh in his successful counterplots against the Jesuits, and in bringing about the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. It consisted of three wings, the two outer ones being the longer, of red brick, and thus forming in outline the letter "E," the initial of the Queen's name. Of dark red brick, with long, low, diamond-paned windows that cockled in their leads and reflected what sun they got at odd angles, the rear portion of Ashford Manor-house was an unconscionable tangle of small rooms, offices, with granaries under the roof, with stillrooms, maids' rooms, secret passages, and pantries. So that one might have lived for a year in the front rooms of the pile with other families entirely unsuspected at another end of the

house. In making, indeed, his tour of the state rooms, Mr. Bettesworth tired before reaching these warrens, and he assented readily enough to Mr. Chuckel's proposition that he should not go down the long, dark, winding passage that, protected as it was by a wicket-gate to exclude the dogs, gave access only to the servants' rooms and to those in which Mr. Chuckel and his family resided. It consoled much more with Mr. Bettesworth's humour to lodge himself in the tall state room on the right of the portico, where the windows were twenty feet high, the white marble chimneypiece, rising to the ceiling, carved with cherubs and grape-vines. Here were hung portraits by Lely and Vandyck, and pictures of still life by a local painter called Cornelius Smith, of Dutch extraction. Mr. Bettesworth announced his intention on that day week to examine in that room Mr. Chuckel's accounts and tallies, and to interview the more important tenants. In the seven days that intervened he was, he said, minded to take a careful view of the estate, and to estimate what it should be likely to produce. This appeared to him, in private, an excellent way of searching over the ground for the original of "Celia in her Arbour."

And as soon as he had finished his survey of the house, he walked leisurely down the long ornamental water that stretched from the end of the grass lawn straight out to where, beyond a high wall and some few house-roofs, the tower of Ashford Church, with its four gilded vanes, rose up towards the sky. A fresh day had succeeded the rain of the night before. Mr. Bettesworth walked slowly beside the

water; the attentive steward, his hat in his hand, walked a quarter of a pace behind him, turning always his toes out like a dancing-master. The water was broad, straight, and slightly stagnant; lazy carp sunned themselves on the still surface, and patches of water crow'sfoot, like brown lace, with tiny white blossoms here and there, broke up the surface, and in one place completely covered the water from bank to bank—as with a half-submerged net.

At Mr. Bettesworth's slight frown Mr. Chuckel hastened to explain that it was the custom of the place for the dykers to come from the marsh on the Monday succeeding Whit Sunday, and then, as part of their suit and service, to clear out the weeds by means of a long chain to which were attached the blades of scythes. It was an old custom that had been handed down from the monks to whom the land had belonged.

Mr. Bettesworth said that if it was an old custom it was no doubt a good one, but he would have considered it better to have had the brushing done earlier in the year; since towards Whitsuntide most of the carp were spawning, and the disturbance must destroy many eggs and young fry.

Mr. Chuckel replied that the fish were accounted to be of no value for the pot, since the river Stour flowed through another portion of the estate and had in it a large supply of excellent, well-flavoured fish. These carp were, he said, of a great age and tameness, so that they were accustomed to come for food when Lady Eshetsford called them. About half-way down the water, beyond the straight lines of the avenue, the trees of the park, oaks and

thorn-bushes, grew very thick and umbrageous; and towards the end there rose on either side long clumps of copper beeches appearing very tall and solid. At the far end of the water was a circular temple or kiosk of solid stone, all round, but with a domed roof of glass. The legend was, Mr. Chuckel said, that Sir Anthony Eshetsford, who had much added to the Manor during the days of the Commonwealth at the expense of his Loyalist neighbours, had built and inhabited this circular dwelling. The reason he had given for its rotundity was, namely, that being convinced, upon the glorious Restoration, of the error of his former ways, in his immense contrition he had builded this refuge all circular so that the Evil One should not catch him in a corner. But most people said that he had built it without windows so that no person from the outside should see him practising the Black Arts, and circular so as to consort with magicians' circles and secret debaucheries. There was said to be an underground passage connecting it with a house in the town where his mistresses used to reside.

Behind the little grey and weather-beaten temple, so overshadowed by trees as almost to evade the eye, was the stretch of the tall park wall. It was formed at this part by the backs of the houses of the town, but only one window gave on to the long and lush grass of the park. At the moment a little company of five deer was standing, their heads all towards the white mullions of the window, their pale hides glimmering and ghostly in the deep shade of the trees.

"In that kiosk now, your Worship," Mr. Chuckel said, "the man Hitchcock, the painter, paints his pictures, and in that house he dwells. Her ladyship has had all the other windows that were upon the houses on the wall blocked up, save only that one; for she much favours the painter, though he is an idle, surly man, who pays no rent for his house and has a pleasant word for very few. But when her ladyship is here she practises very often to sit with Mr. Hitchcock, and she will feed the deer with apples and cakes from that window, so that they may come near and that Mr. Hitchcock may paint them."

"And Mr. Hitchcock," Mr. Bettsworth said, "is not now in his house?"

"Sir," Mr. Chuckel answered, "he is a man of so very secret a nature that one knows neither whether he is in his house or whether he is in London, or how he passes his days or what his paintings be like. But his wife and daughters be always here, and are quiet and sensible bodies enough, and that is all there is to Mr. Hitchcock."

Mr. Bettsworth gazed at the not very distant deer. He approached a little nearer, and, perceiving a gate to the left, he observed that Mr. Hitchcock's was, from that point, the sixth roof in the park wall.

"Sir," he said to Mr. Chuckel, "I will now relieve you of the trouble of my company."

Mr. Chuckel's pallid features fell.

"Your Worship," he said, "I trust I have done myself no ill service by speaking of this painter as I have found him to be; for maybe your Worship,

like her ladyship, is affected with admiration for the pictures of this man. So that I would have you observe that I have said nothing against Mr. Hitchcock's pieces,—which, indeed, I have never seen,—for that would be to decry your Worship's and Lady Eshetsford's taste, which God forbid !”

“I have made,” Mr. Bettesworth said, “no comments upon what you have observed regarding this great man. Very truly it has been said that a prophet has no honour in his own country.”

“But how, your Worship,” Mr. Chuckel said, with lamentation in his tone, “should one have known that this man is a great man? It is inexplicable. Here for the last week have been two gallants from Town poking and prying into all sorts of little places to discover—what? Nothing less than some wench who sat to Mr. Hitchcock for one of his canvases. It is said in the neighbourhood that she has been recognised by her features to be some great heiress that was stolen by gipsies, and these two gentlemen—of the topmost quality, I am assured by those of the Turk's Head—these two gentlemen desire to carry her off and marry her. But I have never heard of any maiden that has sat to this man, nor yet has my daughter, who goes very often to converse with the daughters of this Mr. Hitchcock; though she does it much against my will, for I do not favour this acquaintance. But my daughter is an arrant baggage, who heeds neither God nor her father.”

“Sir,” Mr. Bettesworth said slowly, “I regret that your family should cause you distress, and I will do my best to alleviate your misfortunes. I

will myself interrogate your daughter, and speak to her with all the sternness I can command."

Mr. Chuckel positively shrank six steps back.

"Oh, sir!" he exclaimed, and stood with his mouth wide open.

"Friend," Mr. Bettsworth exclaimed, "this will give me no trouble at all, for I am accustomed on my own terrain,—and I think it is the duty of every owner of much land, since he stands in the place of the King, who stands for God,—to reprimand all such unruly limbs, who might otherwise become pestilent members of the Commonwealth, to whom I stand as the father and lord."

"But, your Worship——!" Mr. Chuckel exclaimed.

"Sir," Mr. Bettsworth said, "I have the honour to wish you a very good morning, for I wish to be by myself, to enjoy my uninterrupted thoughts and to discover the beauties of this sylvan spot."

"But pray, your Worship," Mr. Chuckel said, "let me accompany you and point out to you from where prospects may be seen to the best advantage; and I will have your Worship remember, if your Worship perceive any imperfection in the upkeep of this domain——"

"Mr. Chuckel," Mr. Bettsworth said coldly, "I am minded to observe these things for myself. Later, you shall account to me for them. For the present, I will no more prevent you in the performance of your duties."

He touched the front corner of his hat lightly with the head of his cane, and strode determinedly through the tree-trunks to the left towards the gate in the wall. Mr. Chuckel, his head bowed, his hat

drooping over his eyes, walked very slowly in the direction of the house.

Mrs. Chuckel, a dark, heavy-jawed, untidy woman of forty or so, lay upon a sofa in the long, low, and rather dark Elizabethan room at the extreme end of the easternmost wing of the Manor-house. She was reading a volume of a novel, of which the other twelve were piled on the floor beside her. Upon a little table lay her snuff-box, open and ready for her thumb; a large table was covered with chintzes, over which there sprawled a dress of white muslin printed with red roses. The leaded windows looked out upon a little kitchen garden; her eyes were very intent upon her book. The door was thrust violently open, so that it rattled against the wall, but she hardly so much as elevated her eyebrows. Mr. Chuckel stooped in at the low door, his hat crushed over his eyes, his face hard with passion. "Olivia," he said, "we must pack and run for it. The devil has come down from Town and my accounts are to be scrutinied."

Mrs. Chuckel did not so much as lower her book, but, still reading, said indifferently—

"I have prophesied that this would come," and she yawned.

At the head of her sofa, in a dark corner against the window, there stood a ponderous bureau, and to this Mr. Chuckel strode with the gait of a madman. He pulled out the supports and slammed open the lid itself, with three separate reports as sharp as pistol-shots, and sitting down he began to pull papers in 'showers from the pigeon-holes

and to throw them behind him, so that they fell or floated into all parts of the room.

"You will be wanting Lydia to gather those up," Mrs. Chuckel continued, "and upon her refusal you will be fit to murder her again. Heigh-ho, this is a very pleasant family!"

Mr. Chuckel, in his black clothes, with his rice-white face, now sat still, his face leaning upon his hands.

"The cursedest luck!" he muttered. "The cursedest luck!"

"Spouse," Mrs. Chuckel said, "if you must needs sup with the devil you should take to yourself a longer spoon. I have always said you were too much of a fool to play the villain with address."

Mr. Chuckel smote the back of his palm upon the desk-lid. "God help me," he said, "if I had but ten days more!"

Mrs. Chuckel laid her book into her lap. "How shall a lady read with you a-grunting there?" she said. She moved the cushion behind her head and settled down more luxuriously. "How should ten days help you?" she said.

"Ten days or thereabouts," he answered gloomily. "For I have put all the money that I borrowed of Sir John's into the purchase of three luggersful of French silks that should be here then or thereabouts. And if but one of them escape the Preventives there shall be three times my borrowings to draw as soon as the goods shall reach Canterbury. But now"—and Mr. Chuckel's voice came shrill with a vile rage—"this cursed, cold upstart, arrogant with his 'God damn you' air, this playsharper, this loud

bully, this wench bumbler, this bench hopper, this fan-tearing masque flarer——”

“Husband,” Mrs. Chuckel said, “’tis a very nice, noble, fantastical gentleman, and made me à grand, courtly bow upon the terrace this very morning.”

“—and he will see my papers this day sen-
night, and upon my saying that they would take
long to prepare, says he, curse him! ‘I will even
help you to prepare them myself,’ in his lacka-
daisical manner. For, quotha, he has had much
practice in the careful scrutinizing of accounts of great
estates. I do not believe that this is a grand gentle-
man. Grand gentlemen are more negligent. This
is a lawyer’s pimp; this is a spy of the Pretender.”

“Spouse,” Mrs. Chuckel said, “this is a very high,
lordly, and noble personage, upon a romantical
errand such as only can be read of in novels and
romances.”

“To hang me,” Mr. Chuckel said bitterly.

“Nay, spouse,” Mrs. Chuckel answered. “To
hang you were only the plain duty of a Christian
man, about which there would be nothing romantical
nor fitted for novels by whatever pen. But here
we shall see two arrays of gallant gentlemen set one
against another in hostile battles; and there will be
swordmanship and affrays and love-trysts, and more
murders and ravishings than in ten of your *Spanish
Friar*. Would God it were Lydia they would
abduct, for then our fortunes would be made.”

“Please God,” Mr. Chuckel said, “that too much
reading of foolish garbage has addled your weak
brains, so you must to a Bedlam, and I shall be well
rid of you.”

Mrs. Chuckel folded her hands languidly in her lap. "Can it be that you have not heard of the wager of twenty thousands pounds?" she said. "All the world is a-talk of it in London."

"Beast, begone!" Mr. Chuckel exclaimed.

Mrs. Chuckel leaned farther back upon her cushions. "Why, it is the only way you may be saved from a halter," she said, "if Major Penruddock or Mr. Harcourt should, upon an affair of honour, slay this Mr. Bettsworth; though, to be sure, I pray they may not, Mr. Bettsworth being so heroical that he should well rid himself of six opponents with the mere lightning of his glance."

Mr. Chuckel suddenly stood up. "What is this?" he exclaimed. "Are you certain that Mr. Bettsworth is in a wager with these gentlemen?"

"The newest news-sheets from London speak of nothing else," Mrs. Chuckel answered. "They have come here seeking a great heiress. That is the pity of it, for if it had not been a great heiress they might have taken Lydia or me."

Mr. Chuckel stood leaning intently forward over his wife. "This is a mad tale," he said; and then he added slowly, "But these gentlemen are here! What are we to think of this?"

He remained standing before his wife, his head hanging down over his chest. The low, dark room had a close smell of dampness, and a touch of the odour of hartshorn, for a drain from the stables ran just beneath the window in an open gutter against the wall of the house. His meditations were bitter enough, and he cursed himself for having been till lately too timid a villain. For a matter of

twenty years—ever since he had married his wife—he had been in the employment of land-steward in Lady Eshetsford's family, at first in Scotland and later here. Before his marriage he had been an attorney's clerk, who, by means of extorting bribes from his master's clients, had managed, in his free time, to cut a little dash in the parks and at the opera; for being a tailor's son he could clothe himself cheaply and with effect. But though he had been so long in control of accounts, and with much money passing between his fingers, his early habits had made him very petty in his peculations. He would take the price of a tree here, or of a few sacks of corn there; he would write a pound or two off the rent of a farmer, and say that the money had been excused on account of the bad seasons. And since he played cards with the farmers at the Ordinaries, and had habits of private debauchery, he had in all these years amassed no savings at all. But of late, growing intolerably weary of his wife, whom he detested, and of his daughter, who detested him, he had been taking toll more heavily of the estates; the idea having come into his head of making a plum and of absconding to a part of the country where he would not be known. Sir John, indeed, had become so soaked in brandy and so bemuzzed that there had seemed less fear of detection. So that the whole price of Sweet Corner, Stocks, and Gallows' Woods being in his hands at once, Mr. Chuckel had placed it all in the hands of Thomas Wrangley, the head of the Old Bourne gang of smugglers; a man much trusted and esteemed in the neighbourhood, where he had

almost the rank, and considerably more than the wealth, of a small squire; consorting with the justices, the sheriffs, and even the judges of Assize, for all of whom he turned an honest penny out of the King's pocket. The three hundred pounds had been to be invested in silks, brandies, hollands, and laces; and had the cargo been successfully run,—a thing of which there could be little doubt, since the Preventive officers were lazy and Mr. Wrangsley had them well bribed,—Mr. Chuckel stood to gain a matter of six times as much as he had laid out. With that Mr. Chuckel would have been able to live in ease and some luxury at Taunton, in Devonshire, for the rest of his days. But now was come this accursed *Bettesworth*!

If only he could be put out of the way! If only he could be put out of the way for but a short time, so that, the cargoes being landed and paid for, Mr. Chuckel could restore what he had borrowed from the estate. If only he could be given a good clout over the head, such as should keep him abed for a fortnight!—and Mr. Chuckel had run over in his mind the names of the poachers, deerstealers, and smugglers of the neighbourhood. But these were all very violent fellows; and Mr. Chuckel, being by nature a petty thief, dreaded an accidental murder. He had too much fear of ghosts,—a fear accentuated by long dwelling in those dark, rambling, and creaking apartments. Indeed, the rice-like pallor of his face was said to have arisen because he had found a ghost of Sir Anthony Eshetsford lying in his bed, smoking a Dutchman's pipe, on the night after his arrival at Ashford Manor-house. But ghosts apart,

Mr. Bettesworth was very well attended, there being with him his brother and Mr. Williamson, and each of them had a servant—not to mention the man cook, who might also show some fight. To raise a band of smugglers sufficient to overcome all these would be dangerous; for smugglers had their own form of honour, and could not be trusted, outside their own profession, not to turn informer. So that the information that Major Penruddock and Mr. Harcourt were not the friends, but the rivals, in a wager of Mr. Bettesworth, caused a sudden gleam of furious hope to come into the steward's agate blue eyes.

The door bounded open before shrill ejaculations of delight; a young girl whirled into the room and came up against the chintzes on the tables.

"La! mother," she exclaimed, "I ha' seen him at Mr. Hitchcock's. If only he would be my lover!"

She was shorter than Lady Eshetsford by half an inch, but she had dark eyes full of levity, her upper lip peaked upwards like a bow, her cheeks were very high coloured, the black ringlets fell on to her shoulders, which were bare, because, in the heat of running home across the park, she had pulled off her gaudy red-and-blue neckerchief. She was panting and dancing her feet up and down. In his meditations Mr. Chuckel suddenly smote his thigh and stiffened his back: "By God!" he said. "By God!"

"And, oh!" Lydia exclaimed, "if I only had him for a lover he would be better than either Major Penruddock or Mr. Harcourt!"

Mr. Chuckel gazed suspiciously from the girl to his wife.

"What," he said, "you have been talking of these things already?"

"La!" Lydia said,—she had pulled off her sun-hat and was toying with its knotted strings,—“what else have mother and I to talk about?”

The spasm of a frown went over Mr. Chuckel's pallid brow. He had remembered that Mr. Bettesworth had said that that evening he would talk with this Lydia. He crushed his hat down upon his head. "Understand ye this," he said. "You shall not speak with Mr. Bettesworth alone without my being by, or I will swinge you so that you shall not lie easy abed this fortnight."

Lydia's dark brows came suddenly down into a tense, straight line, her eyes enlarged, her mouth grew rigid with hatred. "An' ye did that," her voice quivered harshly, "an' ye lay a finger on me I will stick your eyes out with my bodkin."

Mrs. Chuckel raised her eyes contemptuously upon her husband. "Are we to grow virtuous now?" she said with languid irony. "This last three years you have been growling me to get Lydia off upon some gentleman, but there is no gentleman here rich enough nor fine enough. And now that there comes this Mr. Bettesworth, with his horses and his men, and his glass coaches and houses in London——"

Mr. Chuckel pressed both his hands to his temples. "Was ever man so cursed?" he said.

"Mr. Bettesworth is the finest gentleman I have ever seen," Lydia said. "He wore a blue coat, and

his sword-head was all of gold, and his ruffles were of finer point than any of my lady's. I ran away at once upon his coming, for I had only on this linsey-woolsey rag, but I will go for the rest of my time in my sprigged silk against my chance meeting him; and I will put flour in my hair, and cut the roses off the south wall for my bosom, and then I shall be another guess maiden than in this dish-clout of a kitchen wench."

A bitter sneer came into the mouth and voice of Mr. Chuckel. "This Mr. Bettesworth," he sneered. "How do you know he is Mr. Bettesworth? For my part I am not certain he is Mr. Bettesworth at all. I have had no letter. I had no letter to announce his approach——"

"Why," Mrs. Chuckel said, "you know very well that the post-messenger was robbed and murdered upon Charing Heath upon the very night before the letter should have reached here."

"But that is not to say," her husband answered, "that he had a letter."

"But you had a letter bidding you entreat my lady's cousin well. Would you have us think that this fine gentleman, so lordly in his airs, so gracious in his appearance, is no more than a thief or an impostor or a Papist?" Lydia exclaimed, with a high scorn.

"For her ladyship's cousin I will not entirely deny him," Mr. Chuckel said; "but in the first place the letter was very ill-scrawled — worse scrawled than her ladyship even is accustomed to scrawl——"

"Why, it was written in haste, as her ladyship

was about to step into her coach," Lydia protested highly.

"—so that," Mr. Chuckel ignored her interruption, "the letter itself may be a cheat. Or, again, her ladyship has many cousins, and some such as her ladyship would not well wish to acknowledge. For they sojourn abroad with the Pretender, and so acquire these high and flowing French airs, and this talk about pictures, such as no honest English gentleman is accustomed to practise——"

His wife spoke with a singular intonation of deep scorn—

"Who are you to talk of the gentry, who have never spoken to a gentleman but walking backwards, bent double, with your hat brushing the floor? Now I, who lived amongst them, until the weary day when I married you——"

"Mr. Chuckel spat out at her a "*You*" of such venom and loathing that she became silent under her rouge.

"For me," Lydia said, "I will go to London with him if he will take me; and I will ride in a glass coach, and have footmen to run before and clear the way for me."

"Why," Mr. Chuckel resumed his sneer, "I doubt if this gentleman dare show his face in London; and the only coach that you would ride in with him there would be a hangman's cart to Tyburn."

"Shall he be a knight of the road now?" Lydia asked, with her nose in the air, and she turned to go.

"No, I am calling him neither highwayman nor thief, nor yet even footpad. But for impostor or Papist I am not so certain. These are troubled

times, and who shall say what a great gentleman may not be who comes with a great army of men and meets other gentlemen at inns, spreading wild, fantastical tales of searching, for heiresses, and wagers."

"I will fill the brandy flagon," Lydia said, "for, for sure, ye ha' emptied it, though I filled it this morning. And for the rest, I will go hang my silk sprig on a rosemary bush in the sun, that the mustiness may come out, and that it may pleasantly affect Mr. Bettsworth's nostrils."

Mr. Chuckel waited till she had closed the door upon her retreat, and then spat the word "Bastard!" after her.

"Husband," Mrs. Chuckel said, "if you have the courage neither to lay your stick about my daughter's back nor yet to say things to her face, it would comport more with the character of a man to bite your tongue and spare your breath when you are an angered."

Mr. Chuckel looked down at the floor. "By God!" he exclaimed, "I think I have this Mr. Bettsworth trapped."

"God save you," Mrs. Chuckel said, and she began again to read her novel.

V

MR. BETTESWORTH had, indeed, caught a sight of Lydia Chuckel at the house of Mr. Hitchcock, but it had been a glance so short, and so suddenly upon an introduction into a new society, that it had caused him no emotion whether of one kind or another. She had been standing behind the two large, brown-haired daughters of Mr. Hitchcock; she had worn a grey dress; she had vanished before the formality of introduction had been performed. But it had intrigued him slightly to observe through the open window, and upon the grass of the park that he faced, the figure of the girl running swiftly in the direction of the house, her neckerchief held in her hand, the wind blowing back her grey skirts. It intrigued him because she had so very soon reached that portion of the park: he had, indeed, not yet finished the necessary complimenting to Mrs. Hitchcock upon the looks of her daughters, and yet he remembered to have observed that, although the painter's house had a window giving on to the park, there was no door in the wall at all until you came to the gate, which was a hundred yards or so distant. The girl vanished from the view of the window, and he turned to question Mrs. Hitchcock. They were

by then all seated and very formal. The two girls were very raw-boned, brown-haired, and large-mouthed, with great teeth, and kind, sleepy eyes. One of them was sewing at a tambour frame; the other was adjusting her sewing, fitting the outer edge upon the embroidery canvas as the lid of a handbox goes on. Mrs. Hitchcock, however, who had been removing brandied cherries from a large stoneware receptacle into more convenient vessels of earthenware, sat with her large hands open upon her lap and smiled maternally at Mr. Bettsworth. With a brown face as large as a warming-pan, the skin netted all over with tiny wrinkles, Mrs. Hitchcock had been a peasant girl when Mr. Hitchcock married her, and a peasant woman she remained. She could not write at all, but she could spell out words of two syllables. She was excellent at preserving fruits and in minding her garden; she was ever contented, but her fingers were too large for needlework and her hands too heavy for pastry or cakes, though she made excellent bread because she had so much strength to give to kneading the dough. She was very shrewd; she was no respecter of persons; and the only holiday she ever gave herself was at times to go into the hop gardens where she had spent her youth, to tie a few vines in the spring and in the autumn to pick a bushel or so. Indeed, a spray of last year's hops depended from a nail above the portrait of her father, that Mr. Hitchcock had painted whilst he was courting her. This hung above the wooden mantelshelf, between the empty gun-racks; for Mr. Hitchcock was no sportsman, not even to the extent of a rabbit or two in

the park of an evening; nor did he so much as carry a blunderbuss for his protection when he travelled. The room was tall for its rather small size. It contained little furniture save the table of dark polished wood, on which, upon a sheet of paper, stood a stone crock, with the delft pots half filled with brandied cherries. A bureau with a glass front in the upper part, revealing a few china plates and many blue-and-white jars of preserves, stood against the left-hand wall and reached nearly to the ceiling. The walls were panelled all round in large squares and painted a dull blue. The floor was so sedulously waxed that Mr. Bettsworth's chair slid every now and then upon it. The room was rather dark, so that near the window the young ladies must hold their eyes close to their embroidery, by reason of the tall trees that hung right over the house.

"Bless 'ee, master," Mrs. Hitchcock said, "we told that Mr. Harcourt and that Major Penruddock, that was here a week ago, that we wouldn't tell 'em nowt, but——" and she smiled broadly upon him, for she dearly loved a fine upstanding man, and Mr. Bettsworth, with his clear complexion, his high features, his oval face, his square shoulders, his blue coat with the gold buttons, golden sword-hilt, and his erect poise as he sat in his tall-backed chair—all these things, as she ran her jovial brown eyes over him, seemed to make him the very figure of a man for her. Moreover, his serious and unsmiling attentions were just what she asked of a man, gentle or simple. "—but I'll tell 'ee this as in a manner of a feavour. We wouldn't tell 'ee

owt neither. Not for lack of goodwill—for you're by way of being not only her leddyship's cousin, but are civil spoken, unlike the other twain, and have hitherto offered me no bribery to betray my lord and master, which was as much as to say that I was no honest woman, and so to set my back against them. But this I'll tell 'ee. If I would I couldn't, for I know nowt of my master's doings nor ask nowt; nor yet do I think it my place, being the weaker vessel of the twain, to ask if I should desire to know."

"Madam," Mr. Bettsworth said, "your ignorance surely, if it springs from such motives, is as much to be commended as it incommodes me."

"Why, thank 'ee, master," Mrs. Hitchcock said cheerfully. "I thought 'ee would say as much, and even so my master is a very secret man. At ten of the clock he will go into his painting room, and we shall not see him, nor hear him, nor smell him—for to say truth he smells always of his paints, which is a smell pleasant enough to me though there be some mislike it. Yes, my master is a very secret man, so that he is even pleased to be pleasant about it, for he has his little quips and rogueries. 'Meary,' will he say to me, 'yo' may tell all the secrets of mine that yo' know. For all that yo' do know could be written down upon a groat, and the writing not so small neither.'"

"But in what do his secrets consist?" Mr. Bettsworth asked.

"Master," Mrs. Hitchcock laughed broadly, "if I knew, would they be secrets from me? But every man has whimsies after his kind: some seek to be

proud ; some are mad for money ; one will set his heart upon having the best horse ; and, bless 'ee, my master is set upon not being overlooked. It is a sort of second nature of the man that is like a badger, who cometh out of his hole only o' nights, and looketh over his shoulder to see that he be not observed. But it troubles me nowt, and is no one else's affair."

"Madam," Mr. Bettesworth said, "surely it is the affair of all the world how so great a man as your husband chooses to live?"

Mrs. Hitchcock's enormous mouth opened, her hands fell open at her sides. "Mercy, man!" she exclaimed. "So great a man as my husband! What has he done to be called great? Is it merely sticking little dabs of paint upon cloths?"

"Madam," Mr. Bettesworth said, "Mr. Hitchcock's name is upon the mouths of every one in London Town; there is no man that is more spoken of nor looked up to than the painter of 'Celia in her Arbour.'"

Mrs. Hitchcock shook her sagacious head.

"Why, men will make toys of anything; and in London Town they have nothing to do but run up and down the streets and gawp at one another, so no doubt they will make a nine days' wonder of my Johnnie."

"Madam," Mr. Bettesworth said, "when I, and the Lords of Parliament, and half the great men of to-day, are forgotten and in our graves, people will be making books of your husband and you and your daughters."

"Of us?" one of the girls tittered.

"Surely," Mr. Bettesworth said, "you have sat as models for your father?"

"Why, I have sat for drawings of my shoulders now and again," the girl on the right said in an uncontrolled voice, and her sister echoed her tones with—

"I sat for my ankles, and crouched down once for a picture of Caliban, which was an ugly dwarf."

"Madam," Mr. Bettesworth said, "since your husband has told you that you may reveal his secrets, surely it is asking you to commit no disloyalty to ask you what persons in this neighbourhood have been limned by your husband on his cloths, and more particularly for a picture called 'Celia in her Arbour'? . . ."

Mrs. Hitchcock's broad sides shook with merriment. "Aye," she said, "I thought you would come to that; but that is what I cannot tell you, for, there is not in this countryside a wench that he could get for love or money that my husband has not tumbled, taking from one a shoulder, from another an arm, from another a breast. And for the picture called 'Celia in her Arbour,' why, I have never seen it, and all I can tell you is that I have the best husband in the world, as husbands go, and one that is all the better in that he is not much in the house."

Towards seven of that evening Mr. Bettesworth called to him Lydia Chuckel. The candles were just lighted in the tall, long room that had the great carved mantelpiece and the pictures by Vandyck, but the sunset was falling in great shafts

of light across the wide prospect of copsewood and marsh that the tall windows afforded. Because it was chilly, a fire had been lit in the hearth-place, and across the great dogs, with roses of bright brass at their heads, a large log sent up pale flames. Mr. Bettesworth sat on the right of the hearth. He had changed his blue coat for one of grey satin, for he expected that evening a visit from Mr. Harcourt and Major Penruddock. Mr. Roland and Mr. Jack Williamson were playing cards at a little table on the other side of the hearth. They both wore their hats, for they swore the old place was woundily draughty.

"Child," Mr. Bettesworth said, "I have seen your face before."

Lydia was in her dress of pink-and-white sprigged silk, her petticoat was of grey satin, her heels were very high, her hair powdered till it was nearly white; and her cheeks were brilliant, and in her bosom were crushed four red roses.

"La! your Worship," she said, "that your Worship can never have done, for I have lived buried in the grave all my life."

"Then surely I must have been a grave-digger," Mr. Bettesworth said.

Mr. Roland and Mr. Jack Williamson were devouring her back with their eyes, Mr. Williamson having interrupted the oaths he was uttering because he had just lost twenty-one shillings to Mr. Roland.

Mr. Bettesworth raised his voice to say—

"I desire to be private with this child."

Mr. Roland laughed, and Mr. Williamson rose,

his hat on one side, his waistcoat disordered, swearing that this was too much of Fortune that he should first lose his money over cards and then be driven from the place when the first possible girl they had seen that ten days came into the room. But, with the air of discomfited musketeers, he and Mr. Roland lunged discontentedly from the room, Mr. Williamson taking up the cards and vowing that he would have his revenge elsewhere. Mr. Chuckel, however, who had stood till now rigid and silent in his black at Lydia's elbow, for all the world as if he were a serjeant in charge of a prisoner, remained still motionless.

"Mr. Chuckel," Mr. Bettesworth said, "I said that I would be private with your daughter."

"But, sir——" Mr. Chuckel expostulated.

"Sir," Mr. Bettesworth said, "if you suspect that I have designs upon the maid's innocence, I vow that I have none."

"Still, sir——" Mr. Chuckel continued, in an extraordinary agitation.

"I do bid you begone," Mr. Bettesworth said. "At first it was a little matter, but your hesitation arouses my suspicion. Upon another hair's-breadth of waiting I will discharge you from your stewardship, and seal up your books and papers."

Mr. Chuckel went with a very obvious reluctance, his feet rubbing on the ground, his head twice making as if it would look over his shoulder.

"Child," Mr. Bettesworth said to the girl musingly, "I am very sure that I have seen your face and heard your voice before now."

Lydia stood before him fingering her under-

skirt, her head hung down in an attitude of shyness.

"Mayhap 'twere some one like me," she said. "I have never been where your Worship has been, for your Worship has never visited here or in any other of my lady's places."

"Your father has always been in my lady's service?" Mr. Bettsworth asked.

She shrugged her shoulders up to her ears, and repeated the words "My father!" with an extraordinary expression of hatred and contempt.

"I hear," Mr. Bettsworth said, "that you are an indifferent bad daughter to Mr. Chuckel. Yet in his reluctance to leave you with me surely he displayed the spirit of a watchful and a protective parent."

Lydia looked under her eyelashes at Mr. Bettsworth.

"I know your Worship is jesting," she said. "Mr. Chuckel was afraid that I would let the cat out of the bag. Nay, he knew I would do it if I could to ruin him."

Mr. Bettsworth sat up in his chair, very solemn and formal. In the falling dusk the firelight and the candles played with yellow reflections on the grey satin of his coat.

"Child," Mr. Bettsworth said, "where is the duty that you owe to your parent and begetter? Not even the lowliest of the beasts would betray its father to ruin. No, not even the cruel tiger nor the abashed jackal. And the Scriptures shall tell you that the relation of daughter to father—nay, even the pious deportment of Iphigenia towards her sire——"

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Lydia shot another glance at him under her dark eyebrows.

"Sir," she half laughed, "that would be monstrous well if this man were my father. But I thank God that he is neither parent nor begetter of me."

In his instinctive maintenance of his dignity Mr. Bettesworth preserved a stiff silence. The flames rustled on the logs, Lydia stood still looking downwards, a strong wind blew against the window-panes. And suddenly, with gentle expiration of his breath, like a low whistle, Mr. Bettesworth uttered the words: "Polly Eshetsford."

Lydia suddenly squared her shoulders, lifted her head, and with a gay laugh swept aside all semblance of shyness.

"I was even wondering," she said, "how long it would take your Worship to discover how it was you deemed you had seen me before."

"Well, whose child are you?" Mr. Bettesworth asked.

"Your Worship and I are by way of being cousins, or nephew and niece. I know not which it is. For her ladyship is my aunt, and you are her first cousin."

"You are, then, the daughter of Jack Douglas of Blair Gowrie;" and slowly he adopted a less rigid attitude, relaxing his limbs so that his spine touched the back of the chair and his head rested on the top rail.

"Why, sit you down, little cousin," he said suddenly. "Let us talk awhile."

Lydia sat down upon a tall chair. She kicked

her heels up and down, and her eyes danced with merriment.

"My father always meant to acknowledge me," she said, "but he died, and my lady has always said that she would have me with her up in London Town but that I could not be in the same house with that brute, her husband; though, la! I do not see that it could have been worse than being as I am in the same house with this brute, Mr. Chuckel." She broke off, and gazed at Mr. Bettesworth with a pert and adoring expression. "Chuckel," she said, "will work you a mischief."

"Child, child!" Mr. Bettesworth uttered demonstratively.

"Why," Lydia continued, "he has been robbing the estates this fifteen year, and now he is very deep in debt; and now, my worshipful uncle, that you may not scrutineer his accounts, he will do a murder upon your Worship if he can."

"Child," Mr. Bettesworth said, and he lifted himself again into a position of more rigid dignity, "if, as you say, your stepfather has been robbing the estate, that will be detectable and he shall be hanged. But what can such a man do against such a man as I be?" and by that he had again rendered himself very formal and erect.

"Why," Lydia said, with a little impish irreverence, "your Worship may be a very great man in the Shires and in London, but this is mid-Kent, and this Chuckel is much in league with smugglers and rough men. Beseech your Worship be careful, for I would not so soon lose so kind and so newly-found an uncle." •

Mr. Bettesworth regarded her with a sort of stiff indulgence. "Child," he said, "you do not know your world. One word from a man in my position against a man in his would crush him as the foot of a cow will crush a frog in a pond."

Lydia reflected for a moment. "Maybe your Worship will protect yourself," she said; and suddenly she jumped up and seated herself on the carved arm of his high chair.

"Oh, uncle," she said, "you will see to it that I come to London Town now that my lady's husband is dead. I will have a glass coach and fine clothes, and footmen to run before and clear the way, and all that fine ladies have in London Town!"

"Child," Mr. Bettesworth said, "no doubt all that is fitting and proper shall be done for you, and love-children to-day are often as well entreated as others. So that if it be proven that you are indeed the child of Jack Douglas——"

"Oh, proven!" she laughed. "Why, my mother hath a mort of papers and settlements; and I am the spit of my lady, all the world and your Worship hath a-proved that."

"Well, I will reflect upon it," he said, "and I will talk of it with Lady Eshetsford when again I see her."

She was seated on the arm of the chair, and suddenly, leaning sideways, she put one arm round his neck and rested her head on his peruke.

"Oh, uncle," she said, "take me to London Town at once. To-morrow,—very soon. You are

the most splendid, the most magnificent, the most generous of men."

"Well, I am generous as my duty bids me be," he said. "I will think upon it. Your voice very much resembles that of your aunt." And Mr. Bettesworth fell into musing, which was rendered the more soothing and the more comforting by the presence of this creature whose frank mendacity pleased his vanity, whose kinship to Lady Eshetsford pleased him since it suggested to him that she was in his neighbourhood. He desired to question Lydia as to Lady Eshetsford—to discover in what chair and in what room she habitually sat, to hear her praises said, and to discover what was her favourite walk in the grounds. But he refrained from asking these questions from a fear of revealing his passion. He was so unused to badinage and irreverence that it did not affect him disagreeably. He felt himself so great a man that Lydia's frankness of address and her fingerings of his person arose, it seemed to him, from a mere charming ignorance, from a want of knowledge of polite usages. She was an illegitimate daughter of Lady Eshetsford's brother, but in those days illegitimacy meant no more than the want of acknowledgment; and if he chose to acknowledge, or if he chose to persuade Lady Eshetsford to take her into her house, there was no reason why he should not regard her as a relation the more. And he imagined the girl acting as kinswoman and companion to his wife. For he had no doubt that Lady Eshetsford would become his wife.

If he prosecuted—and he intended to do it—

his search for the model to Celia with an extreme tenacity, it was only with the intention of showing that he had the power to win the wager,—the wager itself might go. And with the warmth of the fire shed over him, agreeable and soothing, with the girl's head on his own, her feet swinging from the arm of the chair, he began, like Major Penruddock, to review the situation. His tenacity in the search for Celia was only secondary, and supplemented the tenacity of his intention to overcome Lady Eshetsford. It was, as it were, a struggle that he had entered into against her much more than against his rivals in the wager. He intended to find, carry off, imprison, and even to extract a promise of marriage from the phantom model. Then, having the wager won and within his grasp, he would cast her from him by again pressing his suit with Lady Eshetsford. This would prove to her that he was capable of a difficult achievement, and—and that was where the obstinacy of his struggle with her came in—he would by that disprove her accusation. . . . She had said that when found the model for Celia would be to him as desirable in every way as herself.

This he took to mean that his passion for her was of so sudden a growth that it would transfer itself to the first object that came in his way. He could attach no other meaning to her words. But whilst this was in a way a challenge, it might be thought to afford a clue. It must mean that the model for Celia was of equal, or almost equal, rank with themselves. For Mr. Bettsworth thought that his cousin

would do him the credit not to imagine that he would find attractive, or make a marriage with, anyone very much his inferior. It gave him a clue, but, at the same time, it was hardly credible. It was hardly credible that a lady of position would sit to a painter for a set-piece. That she should sit for her portrait would be usual and fashionable. But to sit in a prescribed position holding a hat and a basket, to go before the world as any "Celia"—that could only be done in a moment of recklessness. Yet he seemed to have her word for it that this model was of their condition, and the assurance appeared almost certainly to circumscribe his task. He had made very certain that the picture had not been painted in London. The woman who kept Mr. Hitchcock's lodgings, not having Mrs. Hitchcock's reasons for silence, and being devoured by a curiosity which Mr. Hitchcock's secrecy had rendered only the more furious, had amply assured him that in London Mr. Hitchcock had painted the portraits of persons of quality and the better class of City madams. These he painted at the sitters' houses, bringing them home to finish details of the costumes, and to paint shoulders and hands from models whom he hired. And the woman was more certain of this since, the better to observe the movements of Mr. Hitchcock, and his behaviour towards his models, she had scratched a little hole in the plaster-work of Mr. Hitchcock's garret, and was accustomed, daily, to apply her eye to this . . .

"Child," Mr. Bettesworth said suddenly, "with what families of quality does my lady visit?"

Lydia ran off a string of names: the Knatchbolls,

the Scotts, my Lord Wyndham, the Lord Mersham, and many others. She added that my lady kept a list of such people for her better remembering, and she fetched the book from a drawer in the table beyond the fireplace. This resourcefulness pleased Mr. Bettesworth. He sat with the volume upon his knees and ran his fingers down the pages, inquiring of Lydia as to each inscribed name, how many there were in family and what daughters. He came thus upon the names of five families of some quality within a radius of six miles. He judged it unlikely that any lady would have come from farther afield upon so light an errand as to sit to a painter. The rest of his plan of campaign consisted in the sending of his servants to make inquiries amongst the families of the farmers and their dependents. Mr. Roland Bettesworth was to inquire of attorneys, physicians, and the like. Mr. Williamson was to address himself to the shopkeepers of the town. He, himself, would call formally on those families that had been marked down as being of eligible birth and possessing daughters of due age. And suddenly Lydia, who was looking towards the uncovered windows, exclaimed—

“The man Chuckel is looking in upon us!”

Against a translucent and liquid bar of light in the sky Mr. Bettesworth could certainly observe the blot of a dark figure, but the cockling window-glass, lit with many candles from within, reflected, dark and gleaming, a great many confusing undulations of light. Without showing perturbation or emotion of any sort, Mr. Bettesworth walked to the tall window. He threw it up, and the cool air of

the night pervaded the tall room. It was by then a very dusky gloaming. He listened attentively, and caught the overtones of voices. This puzzled and slightly angered him, and he called out to know who they were on the terrace.

"Egad, Squire," a voice answered him, "we are Simon Harcourt and Major Penruddock."

"Will you be eavesdropping?" Mr. Bettsworth asked, rather coldly.

"Why, to be sure we would," Major Penruddock answered gruffly. "We are all set to make what advantage we can, one from another. And, to be sure, how could we tell but that the fair thing you held in your arms——"

"Sir," Mr. Bettsworth said, "I call you to mind that the child was not in any arms of mine."

"Well, then," Major Penruddock said, "the fair thing that I'd you in her arms. How could we tell that she, herself, was not the very Celia?"

Mr. Bettsworth answered, "Sir, the child is my wife's niece——" and then, suddenly checking himself, he brought out, with some confusion, "the niece of Lady Eshetsford! But," he added, with some displeasure, "I had not awaited eavesdropping from men of quality."

"Sir," Major Penruddock said, "this is, as it were, a war, a campaign. We send out our spies, our vedettes. If your headquarters are not well guarded, that is your affair."

"But Mr. Chuckel?" Mr. Bettsworth asked. "Where is Mr. Chuckel?"

He could, by that time, make out in the darkening twilight the forms of the two men, one of whom he

could identify as Major Penruddock, the other of whom must be the Hon. Simon Harcourt. There was a moment's pause before either of them replied, and then Mr. Harcourt said—

"The steward met us in the doorway. He would have conducted us into the house but, having seen within the window-panes as we appeared, we nimbly ran to get a closer view into your apartment."

"Nevertheless," Mr. Bettesworth said at a hazard, "I heard his voice talking with you even now."

"Why," Mr. Harcourt answered, "he was entreating us to come with him and not to spy upon your Worship."

Mr. Bettesworth said "Hem!" beneath his breath. He set one hand upon the sill and, the window being very tall and the sill very broad, he vaulted suddenly out upon the terrace. In the darkness he came close up to them. "Gentlemen," he said, "I shall have the honour to conduct you into the house, that your spying may be conducted with the more dispatch and comfort. And, for myself, I am very glad to think that these operations are to be undertaken with ungloved hands."

The five gentlemen, including Mr. Roland and Mr. Jack Williamson, passed an agreeable evening, with supper and cards and wine.

VI

MR. JACK WILLIAMSON was invaded by an invincible restlessness. It is true that ten minutes before—it being then half-past ten of the following morning—he had received his marching orders from Mr. Bettesworth. He was to visit the wives of the town shopkeepers, and to discover from them how many and which of their daughters had sat as models for the painter of “Celia in her Arbour.” Mr. Jack Williamson, however, was the younger brother of the Squire of Crawley, and this, he was accustomed to say, had been the sign of what had ruined him all through life. He meant that he was deficient in initiative.

“If I’d ha’ been a man of parts,” he was accustomed to exclaim, cocking his hat over his right eyebrow, and that more particularly when he was in his cups, “I should ha’ pushed my way into the world before my brother; but what must I do but wait like a lamb and come second. There you have me, Jack Williamson, and nobody’s enemy but his own.”

He was invariably wavering except when he had any business in hand, then he would have the persistence of a blood-hound after something else. Nothing would stop him. He was thirty-three.

He had naturally red hair and blue eyes with a cast in one of them, and upon occasions of state he would wear a suit of rusty blue and chestnut full wig. These and a suit of greasy grey, with grey woollen stockings, and a small sword with a pinch-beck hilt, were all that he possessed in the world. From Mr. Bettesworth he had a pound by the week, and his victuals and housing. He was as bold as a lion when he had a leader, but if you found him alone you might pull his nose three times before he could make up his mind to draw.

Having had set to him the errand of catechising the Ashford town madams, Mr. Williamson was pervaded by an irresistible desire to do what he called saluting the cherry lips of Lydia Chuckel. He was aware that the neglect of the one task and the performance of the other would alike bring down on his head the cold anger of Mr. Bettesworth. But he had no sooner been dismissed by his employer, with the command to go instantly into the town, than, finding himself in the great hall with its echoing black-and-white marble tiles, its Ionic stone columns, dim light, and antique busts on tall marble plinths, he felt the irresistible impulse not to turn to the left and so out of the front door. He turned, instead, right-handed.

The hall, with its monuments, ran through the whole breadth of the more modern portion of the building. At the inner end were very tall white doors with silver-gilt handles and finger-plates. And these gave at once on to a very low, rather musty-smelling corridor, with low, leaded windows, black roof beams, and a floor of uneven red brick.

Through the obscure windows could be seen a dove-cote, a quantity of stable manure, and the hide and offal of a steer that had been killed for their entertainment that morning. These lay in the yard formed by two wings of the house. Carried along by the feeling that so inevitably brought him into mischief and misfortunes, Mr. Williamson turned towards the western wing. He pulled open a rusty-hinged wicket-gate at the bottom of some mouldering stairs. At the top of them he entered the western wing, for he remembered to have heard dimly from some one—he had been fuddled for most of the preceding day—that Mr. Chuckel's family inhabited some portion of the rear of the house. The stairs descended as precipitately as they had gone up. They were more worm-eaten; they smelt of decaying wood, and they went down into an entire obscurity. The bottom step half gave way beneath his tread, and saving himself he fell against a door. It gave way, and he found himself in a long, low kitchen that had a brick floor all in waves like the sea, with sink-water standing in a puddle near the bake-oven, and suspended from the rafter a quantity of gammons of bacon and of dried pot-herbs. A very ancient woman in a discoloured skirt, from which the rags depended, and half naked as to the upper part of her person, her thin hair no more than a grey wisp, her eyes bleared and rheumy with the wood smoke, hung over a crock that depended from an iron rack, and mumbled in time to the bubbling of the water.

When Mr. Williamson inquired as to the whereabouts of Miss Lydia, she turned her head over her

shoulder, displayed a single tooth, and with an expression of rage such as is seen upon the features of a huge and disturbed ape, she uttered a single harsh, rattling shriek. As if that had settled the matter, and would protect her from further interruption, she returned her face to her broth and to her mumbling.

"Stap my vitals, a wise woman!" Mr. Williamson said. "If I had it I would cross her palm with gold."

He opened a door and came upon a cupboard, empty save for cobwebs. He opened another, and found it full of old horse furniture and of straw that had been carried in by rats. A white-washed, wooden archway, that promised to lead him nowhere, let him round a dark angle into a low passage where the sunlight fell. Through a half-open door he perceived Lydia Chuckel beyond a littered table, sewing at a pink-and-white garment. She was, indeed, in her underskirt and bodice, sewing at her sprigged silk, which the day before had galled her under the armpits. Mr. Williamson, whose tremulous nerves had been rendered more tremulous by the sight of the old woman, rather fell against her door, and found himself incapable of speech. He determined to drink sherry instead of brandy for the rest of the week. Lydia looked up at him with some composure.

"I cannot come to my uncle," she said, "not for this twenty minutes."

"Stap my vitals!" Mr. Williamson panted, "I am not the lackey in this errand. I am the principal. I am not a note-bearer, I am a gentleman of high degree."

"Sure you have all the air," Lydia said. A cobweb was across his right cheek, and he had collected several more, to drape his battered hat, from the low passages.

"I am a gentleman," he repeated truculently. "I can feel the smart of Cupid's dart like another. You have the neatest back in Christendom."

"Sure, your Worship saw only my back last night," Lydia replied.

"Why, had I been in the mood," he answered, "I had slain Mr. Bettesworth with one thrust of my sword and worshipped you to the face."

"Well, you are in the mood now it seems," Lydia said. •

But the imaginative effort of his previous speech had once more so taken away his breath that Mr. Williamson could do no more than extend two wavering arms, and exclaim huskily—

"One kiss!"

Her laugh started him into such an energy that, refraining from an oath to spare his breath, he started to run round the table. She was back over her stool before he could take it in, and suddenly he found his already dim eyes obscured by yards of muslin. She had cast a discarded petticoat, which composedly she seized from the littered table, over his head; she had carefully dropped her silken gown on to her mother's sofa, to be out of harm's way, and she was round the table and half out of the door before he was well disengaged. He swore then and started to follow her. He observed that she took down a key from a nail in the lime wash of the corridor wall; she opened a door, and was

in the stable-yard. He ran lamely in her tracks.

Mr. Roland Bettsworth stood with his back to his brother in one of the long windows of the great saloon. He, too, had received his marching orders. He was to visit the wives of the physicians, surgeons, attorneys, and apothecaries of the town of Ashford. But inasmuch as this class was comparatively small in the town, there was less haste for his departure. The park spread out below his eyes: three avenues radiating towards the horizon, the central one filled with the ornamental water, and ended by the spire of the church and the cockling roofs of the town.

"Hang me, brother!" he said, "but you have a very comfortable way of life. You are always on the top notch of the tally."

Mr. Bettsworth said, "As how, brother?"

"Why," Mr. Roland answered, "there you sit always in this draughty, big room, with the big windows every one can look in at. When you go to write a letter you must sit out upon the lawn, as stiff as a ramrod, to a table covered with damask. And you are never in *négligé*."

"Why, brother," Mr. Bettsworth answered, "for my part I would be ever *en grande tenue*, and sit as much in public as may be."

"When there are here more than fourteen small retiring rooms, anterooms, and book-closets! Give me a little room, a bottle of claret, and a wench!"

"Thus you lost Maria!" Mr. Bettsworth said sardonically.

"And so you would win—— Now, who is it, brother, you would win? Nor I have not lost Maria so much by wenching, neither, as by lack of a portion. Maria would take me if I had my ten thousand to put against hers."

"Why, if you say that," Mr. Bettesworth answered, "to her; and you shall have your ten thousand pounds upon proof of her consent."

Mr. Roland said, "Say you so, brother?" And again: "Say you even so?" He continued to look out of the window in a pensive silence. His situation very well puzzled him. He could not for the life of him tell where he stood; he could not openly and bluffly ask his brother what were his intentions. For he stood in an unholy fear of Mr. Bettesworth's peculiar turn of mind. Mr. Bettesworth appeared to him so entirely unreasonable in his resolutions, unaccountable in his actions, and whimsical in his methods of putting them into execution. That his brother had been invaded by the tender passion he considered likely, for Mr. Bettesworth would fall into reveries, would sigh at times in a manner not fitting to his full-dressed dignity, would suddenly catch himself up and with some self-consciousness would resume the matter in hand. And, thought Mr. Roland, if a man so frigid and so watchful in his actions could so permit himself to be overheard and overlooked, this must be a sign of a very considerable thirst for some petticoat. Now, if Mr. Bettesworth should marry—for Mr. Roland could not for one moment imagine that his brother would succeed in his quest for the phantom Celia—if Mr. Bettesworth should marry, what would become of

himself? The promise of the ten thousand pounds upon his marriage with Maria, if it aided him somewhat in his deliberations, did not aid him very much ; for the ten thousand pounds were capitally desirable, but Maria, if she were desirable, was by no means an entire necessity to his peace of mind. He would have her as well as any other who had ten thousand pounds to her name. But he was by no means certain that Maria would have him. Had she not seemed to manifest a sudden passion for Mr. Bettesworth himself? Had she not refused to reveal to himself, Mr. Roland Bettesworth, the identity of Celia's original? So that, supposing Maria refused him, would Mr. Bettesworth also refuse him the ten thousand pounds? Might he not say Maria or none other? Might he not marry, and turn his brother out of doors, penniless, to beg his bread or trail a pike in Flanders? Or, on the other hand, might Mr. Bettesworth not himself be enamoured of Maria? Might his offer of the ten thousand pounds be not merely a cruel jest? And Mr. Roland said to himself that his brother was coldly inhuman. He had a power too arbitrary, he would end by coming a mad original, like his uncle before him. He would become the laughing-stock of counties, and the cause for jeers of whole cities. What Mr. Bettesworth needed, in Mr. Roland's eyes, was a prodigious downfall for his vanity, and to be thoroughly fooled by some woman. But that did not help Mr. Roland in his cogitation.

Mr. Bettesworth was sitting in the chair by the chimney-piece. He had upon his knee Lady Eshetsford's book of addresses. He pretended to

himself that he was studying his plan of campaign. More actually he was taking pleasure in the sight of his mistress's handwriting.

"Now," thought Mr. Roland, 'if I aid him to succeed in his quest, he may marry the original of Celia and turn me adrift.' If, on the other hand, he hindered the search, and Mr. Bettesworth failed, Mr. Roland imagined it exceedingly likely that his brother, disgusted with his first essay to conquer the Town, might very well retire, as his uncle had done, to Winterbourne Longa, never to leave it again. "And what sort of life would that be for me," Mr. Roland thought ruefully, "amongst middens and deserts?"

He turned into the room to ask—

"Brother, you are prodigious eager to win the wager. You imagine that this person must be within a close circuit of this town of Ashford. Why, then, do you not take to yourself the town-crier and dispatch him to the market-place and streets, offering a great reward in money, or even your hand and heart themselves, to this Celia if she will manifest herself?"

"Brother," Mr. Bettesworth said, "inasmuch as I am a man, with the brains and perceptions of other men, this thought has presented itself to me also, but I have rejected it. Or, to speak truly, I have deferred it. For you will see, upon reflection, that it should be the last in order of my proceedings. For consider how high a value the offer of my hand would appear to possess. Might there not arise a hundred claimants? How then should I sift between them? Either I must take them up to

Town to confront Mr. Hitchcock, or I must bring Mr. Hitchcock down here to confront them ; and it is very possible that Mr. Hitchcock might refuse me this service. In any case, there will be a delay resultant, so that this should be only a forlorn hope. We have but three weeks remaining for the prosecution of our search. Now, my plan is to have resort to your friend the bellman only if we have not succeeded otherwise ; and many applicants should overwhelm us, we may take all such as are willing to come up to London with us, to be confronted by Mr. Hitchcock."

"But, brother," Mr. Roland said, "may not Major Penruddock or Mr. Harcourt come before you with their plan of the bellman?"

"Brother," Mr. Bettsworth answered, "it shall be your province to keep your ears very well open for any such attempt upon their part. And immediately upon their doing it you shall run yourself to the crier and bid him make my offer hard upon the heels of theirs. And inasmuch as it shall be to their profit to offer at the most a thousand or two thousand of pounds ; and since my offer, as well as my estate and person, are undoubtedly to be preferred to either of theirs, I do not think we need much doubt the issue."

Mr. Roland turned again towards the window, moving his hands in his breeches pockets and whistling gently between his teeth. He was envying his brother's kingly complacency, and wondering whether it would be prudent to ask if the promise of ten thousand pounds attached itself to Maria alone, or would include any other lady with a like dowry

to her back. And suddenly he ejaculated "Ha!" threw up the window, and, as his brother had done the night before, vaulted out on to the terrace. Mr. Bettesworth, without more haste than he imagined consorted with his dignity, walked across to the window and looked out. His brother was running down the steps. He crossed the lawn, plunged into the alley beside the water and disappeared amongst the trees. Mr. Bettesworth returned to his chair. He recommenced to peruse Lady Eshetsford's book of addresses. It was full early to go a-visiting, and he was composedly assured that since he was the centre of this affair any participant in mysteries must of necessity return to him and unravel. Besides, he could not imagine that his brother could have any affair of more importance in hand than the pursuit of a random petticoat. Or, possibly, Mr. Roland's horse might have been brought round to the portico steps, and have been seen by him to be running away through the trees. And Mr. Bettesworth, having pressed Lady Eshetsford's handwriting to his lips, sat in a reverie.

VII

MAJOR PENRUDDOCK and Mr. Harcourt having, out of a proper spirit of courtesy to their distinguished host, exceeded in his excellent Burgundy the limits of sobriety, had been unable to mount their horses on the preceding night, a very considerable portion of which they had passed under the dining-table; Mr. Chuckel having considerably loosened their neckcloths, and removed their finer ruffles and laces that they might not suffer, in so far as these ornaments were concerned, from one another's spurs. Major Penruddock, indeed, with the luck or the foresight of an old campaigner, had slept with his head on the stomach of Mr. Jack Williamson; and having dreamed that he was at the battle of Orulleghem, where the British had made a forced and hurried retreat, he had kicked Mr. Harcourt awake under the impression that he was dealing with one of his subordinates. Mr. Harcourt had in turn awakened Major Penruddock; so that, having crawled on their hands and knees from under the obscurity of the long tablecloth, they found themselves, towards dawn, in the long dining-room, with the light just beginning to penetrate the shutters along with the sound of birds' voices. The light, indeed, was just sufficient to permit them to

replenish their glasses from the many half-filled bottles that, like a thin forest of pointed trees, covered the table, and to fall asleep once more in relatively comfortable arm-chairs. Mr. Bettesworth had been led, and Mr. Roland Bettesworth carried, to their beds, a fact which Major Penruddock described as damned effeminacy before he fell asleep. They awoke to find themselves alone in the room. Mr. Williamson having been summoned to appear before Mr. Bettesworth, and to receive his marching orders, Mr. Chuckel had leisure to return to these two gentlemen, to shake them, and to offer them each a tankard of small beer and a piece of toast, which was the Kentish fashion of obviating the effects of an overnight's too great indulgence in Kentish fire. With his pallid face and his engrossed manner, Mr. Chuckel aided the languid gentlemen to adjust their costumes. He suggested even that a basin of cold water might be found mightily refreshing by their Worships, but they damned him and his ancestry and stood stretching themselves.

"Your Worships," Mr. Chuckel said, when he thought that each of them was reasonably awake, "have you so far demeaned yourselves as to give any thought to my humble prayer and proposal?"

And it came into their dazed heads that the evening before, on the blue twilight of the terrace, just before Mr. Bettesworth had vaulted from the window, Mr. Chuckel had been making suggestions to them for the betraying of his temporary master.

"Oh, begone, dog!" Major Penruddock said. "What sort of a state is a gentleman in of a

morning to consider of chicanery? You must come to him when he has a skinful of wine."

And Mr. Chuckel, with his deep silence and his toes turned out, acknowledged the justice of the remark by withdrawing from the room.

The morning sunlight streamed obliquely into the windows, striking in the one case upon the bust in black marble of Julius Cæsar, and in the other upon a small white marble dolphin that supported a naked baby. Mr. Harcourt stared with his lack-lustre eyes at the Major.

"Why, before God!" he said, "we have not consulted upon this swine's proposals."

Mr. Penruddock glared at Mr. Harcourt with a sleepy ferocity.

"You are to blame," he said. "I am sure you are to blame; and you have extracted nothing from this Bettsworth puppy concerning his plans."

"Major," Mr. Harcourt said, "if you had not begun upon your plaguy long account of Dettingen I might have had the opportunity of worming all his secrets from Mr. Bettsworth."

The Major displayed a sudden and astonishing placability.

"Why, to be sure," he said, "when I get upon the subject of that glorious victory I am apt to grow eloquent, and when we consider his glorious Majesty's disposition of the horse upon the wing——"

"Major," Mr. Harcourt interrupted him, "with all due respect for your captaining of our present expedition, it appears to me that the time has come for a consultation as to our present campaign rather

than a disquisition upon those, however glorious, that have gone before."

"Why!" Major Penruddock said, "I am to blame in this, for it was the act of a foolish captain to have left so serious a piece of reconnaissance in the hands of one whom I very well knew to be an intolerable blabber and a wine-bibber. Therefore, very cordially, I absolve you from your share in this present failure."

Mr. Harcourt bowed formally to the Major, and the conversational effort having exhausted each of them, they refreshed their senses in a temporary silence.

"As God's my life," Mr. Harcourt said, "I cannot feel my feet. I will not ride a plaguy beast back into the town."

"Mr. Harcourt," the Major said gravely, "you are in the right of it. Let us walk a few paces in the air to recover our composure."

Their hats were laid side by side upon a white satin settee against the inner wall of the room, nevertheless to find them was a matter of some difficulty for these gentlemen. Nor did the open air much restore their faculties. They wandered side by side down the broad stone steps of the terrace; they were silent; they were as if in deep reverie, though from time to time one of them would deviate with a slight lurch from the straight path. Thus it appeared to them no more than a part of the general dreamy hallucination—it appeared to them in no wise out of the ordinary or surprising—when a maiden, her dark, half-powdered hair hanging over her shoulders, her petticoat very short, her bodice

very low, ran past them at a slow pace, laughing, and looking back over her shoulder, to dodge sideways into the avenue of trees that bordered the water path. Presently, with three steps of a run and one of a wheezing halt, Mr. Jack Williamson also passed them and vanished among the trees. They continued their serious promenade, and, growing more vertiginous, neither ventured himself upon the danger of conversation.

Nevertheless, a rudimentary curiosity led them to follow generally in the direction that had been taken by that nymph and that satyr. They seemed to be in a poppied and agreeable world of romance. The sun shone genteelly, the grass was smooth, the fowls of the air uttered melodies, the carp moved slowly upon the surface of the smooth waters.

They approached more nearly to the kiosk at the end of the reservoir; they heard two voices; they perceived that a door was opened in the lichened stone of the temple. They pushed it more ajar, and huddling sideways, to enter simultaneously, they impeded each other's entrance. Together they receded. By contrast with the sunlight outside this interior was dimmish. It was encumbered by strange objects that stuck up, that leaned against walls, that were dust-covered, that had musty and unusual odours. They staggered together back from the doorway, the eyes of both were round with astonishment, the mouths of both were open. Then—

“By God, Celia!” Major Penruddock exclaimed, and he was echoed with—

“Celia, by God!” from Mr. Harcourt.

Major Penruddock ceremoniously drew his sword, and with a formal and rather prancing movement stepped across the sill of the studio. The shock of discovery, he thanked God, had very expeditiously cleared his brain. He said—

“I claim, in having found Madam Celia, to have gained my portion of the wager.” •

Mr. Williamson, perceiving a naked blade, had, as a first impulse, the motion to draw; but having his sword out, he found some difficulty in discovering words appropriate to the situation. Nevertheless, a sort of dim indignation forced from him— •

“God help me, wasn’t it I who found her?”

Lydia, with her hands behind her back, pulling at the strings of her stomacher, threw out a paralyzing peal of gay laughter.

Mr. Williamson felt that he was a very ill-used man. With halting steps and a strong disinclination for running, he had pursued Miss Chuckel round a stable-yard, through an overgrown herb garden, into an untended maze of holly trees. He saw her white garments through the spines of such a bush. She was waiting, laughing, and undetermined as to upon which side to brush past him, just outside his asthmatic grasp. He was panting, and his chest rustling, when suddenly she appeared to come to a determination. She set off at a slow trot towards a gap in the holly hedge, looking backwards over her shoulder as a dog does to ensure that it is being followed. •

Lydia Chuckel had indeed arrived at the resolution of her life—at the resolution that ultimately turned her into the famous Mrs. Thynne about twenty years later—the Mrs. Thynne of whose following, enormous and composed of panting gallants and beaux, Mr. Jack Williamson was so exactly prophetic. It was mainly because, even in the enclosed gardens, the air had in it a slight bite for her uncovered shoulders and lightly clad limbs. She thought, in fact, that it was too cold to be out of doors without a dress, and Mr. Jack Williamson could not obviously afford her sufficient running exercise. Dark, *insouciant*, not quite tall enough as yet for what was then considered perfect symmetry, Lydia Chuckel, with her charms and her moods, was no more than a savage, with the gifts of a savage and a savage's intuition. She had already realised that to pass herself off as "Celia" would be to ensure for herself a great many advantages. Where Celia's dress was she knew very well, and her histrionic instinct made her thirst to assume for a time the pensive rôle of a gentle charmer beneath umbrageous boughs, but she was very loath; she had sufficient of the savage's intuitive fear to avoid going direct to Mr. Bettsworth and saying, "I am Celia," for when the fraud—if it were a fraud—was discovered this would mean that the immediate wrath of Mr. Bettsworth would shower straight over her shoulders, whereas if the discovery could be made by another—and who better than Mr. Jack Williamson?—if the discovery of herself in the pink-and-white frock, with the hair drooping upon the shoulders, the broad pink ribbon strings and the little strawberry frail—if this

discovery could be made, proclaimed, asseverated and reasseverated by Mr. Williamson . . . she would need neither to affirm nor to deny. She could say that, La! she didn't know. She could feign an animated, a childish, a charming imbecility, an attractive feminine ignorance of Mr. Hitchcock's work. She could say that she had sat to him so many times, and for the life of her she couldn't remember whether she had sat for "Celia in her Arbour." She had sat certainly for "Celia at her Dressing-table," "Celia at her Mantua-maker's," at the Gipsies' encampment, and at the attempted abduction. But for the rest . . . la! she couldn't tell! By the time when she was unmasked—if she was to be unmasked—she would be able to act this little scene with the most absolute naturalness. She tingled, indeed, to her finger-ends with the desire to be given the opportunity to act this little scene. She would be able to say that they had seen her, that they had taken their own conclusion, that she had made no claims. And by that time she hoped to have established such a dominion over Mr. Bettesworth's affections that . . .

She tripped slowly along, her shoulders shining, her curls patting upon them like shaken clusters of grapes. She ran slowly enough, not to make hope die in the heart of Mr. Williamson, who panted behind, and fast enough to keep well out of his hot grasp. At her first starting from the house, she had taken from the nail the key of Mr. Hitchcock's pavilion, for she was accustomed to shut herself up there amongst the deserted easels and dusty stuffs to read her mother's novels by the hour, to rouge

her cheeks and paint her eyes before the mirror in which Mr. Hitchcock was accustomed to view the canvas upon his easel, and to consume secret stores of sweetmeats that she stole from her mother and from Mrs. Hitchcock's open cupboards.

Slipping with perfect self-possession and a tranquil mind by Mr. Harcourt and Major Penruddock, she passed obliquely across them and into the trees in order to afford them a more favourable view of her person, and in the long line of the tree-trunks she dropped to a walk in order to permit them the more easily to follow her. This was not so much because she intended that they should identify her as Celia, but because she desired to be pursued, to have her limbs admired and her person coveted. It was this position of affairs, this clear panorama, which Mr. Roland Bettesworth had observed when, uttering his ejaculation, he had vaulted through the window on to the flagstones of the terrace.

VIII

LYDIA increased her pace so as to reach the kiosk a full twenty yards in front of Mr. Williamson. She should, indeed, have made the distance greater, since the lock was rusted and the key turned with difficulty. But in delaying, in order to attract the attentions of Major Penruddock and Mr. Harcourt, she had lost more space than had entered into her precise calculations. The garment in which Celia had sat hung over an easel, and she had it over her head and the stuff was obscuring her view when already Mr. Williamson stumbled over the threshold. Thus he had her in his arms before her face actually emerged from the rather dusty material. She drew her head back, and then, bringing it swiftly forward, her forehead smote hard and like a battering-ram upon the poor gentleman's jaw. He staggered back from her, holding his hand to his lip and protesting, since most of the impetus had been taken out of him by his long run, that this was monstrous ill-usage. He had, indeed, in his muzzy brain the idea that so considerable an exertion had entitled him in all morality to some sort of reward. But Lydia's head emerged from above the pink-and-white, and her first words were—

“Beast, I am meat for your masters!”

She was very angry, but more angry at her own slight miscalculation than at Mr. Williamson's desires, which, in a sense, did him credit and were only her due.

"Obscène hog!" she continued. "You are like a new puncheon when it sweats. You are like a brandy anker that has been started on the beach."

She was thrusting her arms into her sleeves, and with sinuous motions of her body was jerking her dress into its places. And Mr. Williamson, recognising a master mind, became at once once more a servant. He was looking at her with his mouth still open, awaiting instructions and advice as to how they stood one to another, when Mr. Harcourt and Major Penruddock wedged themselves in the doorway. And the only actual satisfaction came to him when, seeing Major Penruddock re-enter with his sword drawn, he himself felt at liberty to draw his own rather rusty and rather notched blade. It had seen so much service against night-watchmen, tailors' apprentices, and belated citizens in the night streets of London, that he felt it to be a trusted companion, a comforting factor in a too bewildering situation.

"Sir," Major Penruddock said, "we claim the person of this lady, and since you are outnumbered, we being two to one,"—and he looked out into the sunlight, where Mr. Harcourt, at the sight of swords, appeared rather wavering and indefinite,—"since we are two to one, you may very honourably surrender."

Mr. Williamson looked appealingly at Lydia Chuckel. She was still pulling tight the laces at her back; behind her head, on one corner of a

square easel, hung the broad straw hat of Celia, the pink ribbons depending almost to the floor; at the other corner was the strawberry frail, also with its pink ribbons. Her dark hair, which had come unsnooded, dropped on to one side down her cheek and fell on to her shoulder. She gave, however, no sign to Mr. Williamson, and, awaiting it, he stood irresolute, his sword drooping. He mumbled as if he were addressing himself, or as if he expected to find Major Penruddock a fair-minded interlocutor, that it seemed to him that he had been the first to find the girl, and that she was, in consequence, his property.

"Sir," Major Penruddock said, "the matter is very simple, since, unless instantly you surrender this lady into my charge, I will slit your throat from ear to ear under the jaw-bone."

"Oh, if it is a matter of slitting ears——" Mr. Williamson mumbled.

The threat brought illumination to his thoughts, and he looked first at Major Penruddock's blade and then at his own, which was much heavier. "I shall split your sword into shilders at the first blow," he mused.

"I shall withdraw it and run it through your windpipe," Major Penruddock answered. "Besides,"—and he beckoned with his hand behind his back to Mr. Harcourt,—“Mr. Harcourt, if he be not man enough to meet you face to face, will woundily pink your back whilst I engage you before.”

"That will be met by setting my back against the wall," Mr. Williamson said.

In a gingerly fashion Mr. Harcourt had followed

his leader's command, and had crept in at the door. "Besides——" Mr. Williamson said, and with a sudden motion he seized a large sackcloth of gamboge from the painter's table in his left hand, with a dexterity that, learnt as it was in tavern brawls, was unexpected by the Major, whose education was solely of the camps. With an outward swing of his hand Mr. Williamson discharged the bag with a forcible exactness upon Mr. Harcourt's protuberant waistcoat, and the air was filled with yellow fumes, in the midst of which Mr. Harcourt lay doubled up and groaning in the corner. And quite quickly, in the midst of an enormous crash of palettes, of palette-knives, of colour bladders that hopped and rolled about the Major's feet, Mr. Williamson had upset the painter's table and stood behind it in between the four legs. His hat and wig had fallen off, and a great deal of the yellow dust decorated his right shoulder. "Besides," he continued, panting, but with some composure, "your reinforcements are disabled and I am entrenched. You cannot strike my throat, for the table will protect me; whilst with my broadsword, by God! I will split you to the chin if you come within reach! The lady is mine!"

"In any case," Major Penruddock grumbled between his teeth, "you shall not, nor she neither, have any exit from this door, and I have won my bet from Mr. Harcourt."

Mr. Harcourt had arisen in his corner. He was powdered yellow from head to foot, but he gasped gallantly—

"No, by God! that point must be brought before a tribunal of the club."

"Why, by God!" the Major growled, "unless you concede it now you die upon the spot."

"Then," Mr. Williamson commented, from his entrenchment behind the table, above which only his blotched face and bleared eyes gazed with a ferocious happiness, "whilst your sword is engaged with your ally's guts, mine will be upon your buttocks."

There was, at that moment as if from behind Mr. Williamson's back, the report as if of a demi-culverin. Mr. Harcourt leapt into the air; from the doorway there came the voice of Mr. Roland Bettesworth.

"How!" he said with a clear and composed amazement; and then, as his eye took in the disorderly contents of the room, "Will you assassinate our dear bully, Jack?"

Because Mr. Roland Bettesworth had been given the task of visiting outlying physicians, and farriers who resided in lonely farms, he had, as a precaution, already got himself a pair of pistols whose muzzles were of formidable dimensions, and with one of these, with great deliberation, he covered the waistcoat of Major Penruddock.

"Major," he said, "I shall be pleased to oblige you later in any convenient spot, but this place is too confined; and, for the moment, I am your master, so that unless you lower your point, call a truce, and explain this *mêlée*, I swear by the body of Christ there shall not be an inch of the wall behind you left undecorated by your vitals!"

The Major had learned already, by frequent experience, how to surrender with the honours of war gracefully before overwhelming force. He inserted

the point of his sword in between two boards of the floor, as if he had been putting it into a cork, to show that he disarmed himself.

"Why," he said, and he moved his hand towards the interior of the room, "since I have found this lady——"

"But I call you to witness," Mr. Harcourt explained, "that the Major was not the first to find her——"

"No, by God!" Mr. Williamson grunted, "I found her, and I have protected her from these bloody ravishers like a true mohock."

He stood up, whereas before he had been crouching, and leant with his arms crossed as if over a garden wall.

"They was two to one, but I ha' culled 'em. I ha' coloured 'em, too; and if there be a reward, it shall be mine who found Celia."

"But this lady," Major Penruddock began stoutly, "should be given the option of with whom she will go, for this is a Christian land, and we are no Papishers to whom the ravishing of virgins is a daily occupation. God save the King and the Protestant succession!"

"Your loyalty," Mr. Roland said in his clear tones, "shall no doubt be of service to you; but even where and what is this lady?"

Mr. Williamson sprang round on his heels. He poured forth oaths as a volcano pours forth lava. Mr. Harcourt brushed the ochre from his eyes. Major Penruddock's jaw fell.

"Upon my soul!" Mr. Roland said, "my brother's wine is more potent than who would have thought.

For here upon the morrow morning you have seen, tousled, and fought for a Celia who is no more than a vision of the grape."

He looked at them with his cool and ironic grin, and waved his hand round the circular studio. There were in it three easels of different shapes; against the wall a brown chest of oak, such as those within which carpenters keep their tools; the inverted table with the muddle of rags, paint-bladders, and knives; and the bare walls. Mr. Williamson kicked violently on the inner side of this piece of furniture. It toppled slowly over, and the four legs pointed mournfully to the skylight. "By God!" he said mournfully, "she was a vision, and she has flown up to heaven!"

Their lethal weapons seemed to have been rendered so innocuous by this shock that Mr. Roland ventured himself in amongst them.

"Surely," he said, "she must have slipped out through the door, yet I never saw her and I was on the outside."

Mr. Harcourt gesticulated helplessly towards the inner apex of the circular room.

"Down there!" he said. "Down there! Did you not hear the trap-door slam?"

"I thought it was a culverin," Mr. Roland said. He strode, grinning and unconcerned, across the floor. He had no cause for vexation. "Why, here is a ring!" He bent, jerked, and there came up a square piece of the flooring.

"You damned oaf!" Major Penruddock said to Mr. Harcourt. "Could you not have called out?"

Mr. Harcourt muttered, "No, nor could you

neither if you had such a meal as I," and he spat yellow drops upon the floor.

Mr. Roland handed his pistol to Jack Williamson. "Keep you the opening," he said. "I will descend."

There went down a comfortable flight of stone steps into a long stone passage, through which there fell from above, about half-way, a beam of broad light barred by a grating. Mr. Roland Bettsworth skimmed lightly along. He was laughing consumedly to himself, for here was the underground passage by which Sir Anthony Eshetsford of the Revolution had been accustomed to visit his concubines whilst he was supposed to be in the act of prayer. Stone steps went up at the end, and a door led him into a white-washed closet full of crocks upon shelves, and decorated as to the ceiling with hams and festoons of black puddings. He pushed the door ajar and stood in the presence of Mrs. Hitchcock, who was pouring green gooseberries from an apron into a stoneware crock, and with her two daughters who were sewing at their embroidery tambours.

He pulled off his hat, and flourishing it, asked—

"Madam, has Mistress Celia passed this way?"

Mrs. Hitchcock grinned all over her enormous brown face. "Ye'll be coming down the chimney like the boo-boys next," she said. "Such a coil about a Celia! Young gentleman, who are you?"

"Madam," Mr. Roland said, "I am Mr. Bettsworth's brother. I pray your pardon for alarming you."

"Alarming!" Mrs. Hitchcock laughed. "Says Lydia to me: 'They will be a-following and

a-hitching and a-fitching after me, but do ye, Mrs. Hitchcock, not tell 'em nowt save it be Mr. Bettesworth's man ;' and hot-foot she is run to Mr. Bettesworth, so 'ee may spare your capers and eat a brandied cherry."

Mr. Roland reflected that, if Lydia Chuckel were indeed running to his brother, the longer the Major and Mr. Harcourt were entertained by Mr. Williamson at the pistol's mouth the safer would be her transit. He sat down, therefore, upon one of the four dark chairs that slid upon the polished floor, and, depositing his hat on the ground by his side, took the spare end of the elder daughter's silk from the table.

"Young lady," he said, "let us play at cat's-cradle for kisses, for this town could afford no felicity greater than the touching of your swansdown fingers."

The two large girls giggled, and nudged each other.

Major Penruddock and Mr. Harcourt waited an interminable age before the muzzle of Mr. Williamson's pistol. They discoursed upon their plight, and cursed each other with freedom ; but at last, subterraneous and awfully booming, there welled into the small place from the passage the words—

"Release the prisoners, Jack, and come and drink."

It was Mr. Roland calling from the buttery door.

"Gentlemen, I have the honour," Mr. Williamson said. "Put your tails between your legs and skulk."

The Major and Mr. Harcourt stepped out into the sunlight.

"We may debate on Mr. Chuckel's plan," Mr. Harcourt said; "for, war having failed us, there remains nothing but the art of the fox."

IX

MR. BETTESWORTH sat for so long in his chair that he outpassed the time suited for his dignity, and entered a period of almost angry impatience. Finally he pulled the long, pink satin ribbon that set in motion the large bell, specially allotted to Mr. Chuckel. The steward, who had indeed been listening at the keyhole, permitted a respectable interval to elapse, and then, with an air half-way between assurance and extreme nervousness, presented himself in the tall doorway.

"Sir," Mr. Bettesworth said, "will you afford me information as to any occurrences in the avenue?"

"A singular agitation overcame Mr. Chuckel. He had expected no occurrences in the avenue; he knew of none.

"My brother," Mr. Bettesworth said, "half an hour ago leapt suddenly through the window. Since I cannot imagine that he was overtaken by the fate of the Gadarene swine, I can only speculate that something of an unusual character took place within his purview." He continued, with a shade more of disfavour in his voice: "It appears to me that, as my lady's steward, it is your business either to know of or to foresee any occurrences in her park."

Mr. Chuckel, with almost trembling lips, brought out

such phrases as that, on account of Disloyalists, Papists, and Jacobites those were very troublous times; that on account of smugglers and the lawless, that was a troubled region. But for the life of him he could not understand what, upon that bright May morning, could have occurred to disturb the serenity of the unruffled lawns, or to cause a young gentleman suddenly to jump out of a window.

"Sir," Mr. Bettesworth said, "I see no reason why smugglers, Papists, or Jacobites should be introduced into this matter; and the course to be pursued, it appears to me, is that I should make investigations which should have been your work." He added curtly the three words, "Attend on me," and having found his hat and stick, he proceeded with a very great stiffness to walk across the great room, through the large hall whose black-and-white marble tiles echoed their footsteps, and down the broad stone steps on to the circular lawn. Mr. Bettesworth's frame of mind, as far as it regarded the steward, was one of cruel, godlike contempt; he considered himself as Olympian Jove showing disfavour to a worm. Mr. Chuckel, on the other hand, followed Mr. Bettesworth in a state of lamentable perturbation. He kept a distance of perhaps four feet, and he bowed automatically as was his habit, with his eyes well upon the golden galoons and tassels of Mr. Bettesworth's blue back. The black tie of Mr. Bettesworth's wig moved in the breeze, the skirts of his coat were too stiffened with gold lace to do more than just to move with the rhythm of his stiff footsteps. And if, Mr. Chuckel thought,

he could only hold out till nightfall; if he could only keep Mr. Bettesworth unsuspecting till that night, when Mr. Bettesworth was to return, at the Turk's Head, the visit of Major Penruddock and the Hon. Simon Harcourt! He regarded Mr. Bettesworth's back with a black hatred. Then, he thought, he would have this abominably arrogant man, at any rate for a time, in his own clutches. He would have him disabled, fooled, humiliated, and shut up for as long as it would take for a messenger to reach the Secretary of State in London, and to return. He would have his cargoes of French silks and brandies run, sold in Canterbury, and the money in his strong-box, all ready to make his accounts square with all the rent-rolls, all the under-wood tallies, and all the Copy-holders' services. Mr. Bettesworth might rave, Mr. Bettesworth might even cause my lady to dismiss him, but he would have made his profits; and, in the matter of accounts, he would be safe from the hangman. But what in the name of the devil this new coil could be; what could have caused that whelp, Mr. Roland, to jump out of the window—that passed him to imagine. Could Mr. Stareleigh have precipitated matters in a panic?—Could Major Penruddock or Mr. Harcourt have acted suddenly on his information? Or could Mr. Bettesworth, believing the information that Lydia undoubtedly had given him the night before—could Mr. Bettesworth be decoying him out in the park to have him suddenly arrested, to demand his keys of him, to shut him up, whilst with his cold and diabolical persistence Mr. Bettesworth investigated his

accounts? Then, indeed, everything was lost! And suddenly he uttered a sort of choked wail—they were continuing their slow promenade beside the water, Mr. Bettesworth had his hat beneath his arm; he was walking with his hand a little below the head of his long cane, so that it gave him the air of a gold-stick in waiting. He stopped and pivoted round on his heels—

“What is it you are pleased to perceive?” he said coldly.

Mr. Chuckel, whose face had turned from a rice-white to an ashen grey, stuttered—

“Your Worship, nothing! Nothing in the world!”

Mr. Bettesworth coldly ignored these asseverations. He swept his eye inexorably over the surface of the water, over the trunks of the trees on the opposite bank, over what was visible of the lawn, the terrace, and the house front. His cold stare came back to the trees on the right-hand side, and then, deliberately, he said, “Ah!” and stepped amongst the trees of the avenue. His remorseless eyes had perceived what Mr. Chuckel’s had before him—the extreme end of a gown whose wearer was otherwise hidden from them. In advancing towards it Mr. Bettesworth uttered no word at all, and Mr. Chuckel followed him, clenching and unclenching his hands in impotent fury and dismay. He could understand nothing, and the first thing that came into his muddled mind when they had a full sight of Lydia was a question as to where in this world his stepdaughter had procured this dress, that he had never seen upon her?

Lydia Chuckel had been seated in a genuine pensiveness on the gnarled and spreading bole of one of the small thorn-trees that grew in under the oaks of the park, and, becoming aware of the approach of Mr. Bettsworth, she maintained the attitude for the sake of an effect that delighted her. The strawberry frail was at her feet, she held in her hand the broad pink ribbons of the immense garden-hat that lay in her lap. And all her actress' soul bubbled with delight at the thought that she must present exactly the appearance of "Celia in her Arbour."

Having escaped from Mrs. Hitchcock's by the front door, she had run as fast as she could to the park gates, and then in a bee-line through the trees towards the house—she had meant to throw herself at Mr. Bettsworth's feet, and to implore protection from the dangerous men who, with lethal weapons, had sought to carry her off. She imagined that she would thus present to Mr. Bettsworth, if not the exact picture of "Celia in her Arbour," at least a very convincing one of Celia in distress. But even to her small sparrow's soul Mr. Bettsworth seemed a personality somewhat minatory and alarming. She had treated him with playful disrespect, but she had done it all the time with a concealed trepidation.

Thus, having nearly run herself out of breath, and aware that she might reach Mr. Bettsworth more hot, flushed, and tousled than beauty in distress altogether demanded, she had sat down upon this mossy bole to let her complexion recover its normal pink and white, and give herself time for reflection.

It was all, after all, simply a matter of terms. She was by then undoubtedly launched upon the career of Celia. Mr. Williamson had sworn to it; Major Penruddock had confirmed the oaths by his actions; Mr. Harcourt had obviously not a doubt of the matter. But she was not so certain of Mr. Bettesworth; and of Mr. Roland she was very dubious indeed. Mr. Bettesworth she knew to be immensely rich. She knew, also, that he was pledged by a very heavy wager—the *London Mercury* said it was a wager of at least a hundred thousand guineas—to carry off the original of Celia. So that to Mr. Bettesworth, if he accepted her as Celia, she would obviously be worth a good round sum. But, on the other hand, Mr. Harcourt and Major Penruddock presented also the appearance of men of fashion and of wealth. One of them the journals stated to be a man of very broad acres in the West. The other was at least a member of His Majesty's Privy Council, with enormous patronage at his disposal, and means enough at least to permit him to engage upon this enormous wager.

She sat upon her mossy bole and, pensive, with a mournful and romantic air, with her eyelids drooping, her mouth contemplative and tender, the dark locks falling upon her shiny shoulders, with an air of virginal reverie, she addressed herself to her reflections. It seemed to her probable that Major Penruddock and Mr. Harcourt together must be worth at least as much as Mr. Bettesworth alone, and in her small soul she felt a greater kinship to either Mr. Harcourt or Major Penruddock than to Mr. Bettesworth. If Mr. Bettesworth was the more

shining figure, he was also much more serious. She had hardly seen him smile—she could not imagine that he could laugh or give way to any intemperateness. Major Penruddock she had heard to swear, and to give way to passion. Mr. Harcourt had a pleasant ogle in the corner of his dark eyes. And it occurred to her—she felt it rather than thought it out—that to be the mistress of Mr. Bettesworth would be an affair of intolerable dullness. She wanted lights, riot, and abandonment; and at the thought of Mr. Bettesworth her flower-like lips drooped, and her dark, uncandid eyes grew shadowed. Besides, Mr. Harcourt and Major Penruddock were already convinced that she was the original of Celia: Mr. Bettesworth remained to be convinced. And he must be convinced in a manner so overwhelming that she could reap an enormous and immediate reward, so that when Mr. Bettesworth himself became intolerable, or discovered the cheat—if it was a cheat—she could upon the instant abandon him for a life more gay, and one in which she could be her own mistress. An absolute and overwhelming belief! . . .

And Mr. Bettesworth, approaching through the trees that made, as it were, aisles, arches, and even frames, around him and the small, changing interstices of bright landscape, exclaimed suddenly the one word "Celia!" whilst at the same moment, behind his back, Mr. Chuckel cried out: "By Heaven, Lydia!"

Mr. Bettesworth imagined that in a flash he understood the perfidy of Mr. Chuckel—all the

stutterings, the perturbation, and the reluctance to come out of the house. The mutterings about Papists, smugglers, Jacobites, and the lawless, had been merely false suggestions to throw him off the track. Chuckel, it came to him convincingly, had sold the secret to his rivals. His brother, when he had leapt through the window, must have seen Celia on the way to some rendezvous to which Mr. Chuckel, using his brutal authority, must have coerced his stepdaughter.

"Believe me," he said to Lydia, "you have nothing to fear from this man Chuckel or any other man."

The words threw Mr. Chuckel into an extraordinary state of agitation. He imagined that without doubt Mr. Bettesworth had his men waiting amongst the trees to arrest him. There could be no other construction to be put on it.

And suddenly, with a hissing expiration of the breath, he flung his hat violently upon the turf, and dashing from behind Mr. Bettesworth's back he ran away into the open, across the broad stretches of sunlight towards the park gate. It appeared to Mr. Bettesworth that Mr. Chuckel must be running to warn his confederates. In his habitual caution, however, he did not set to work to question his new-found Celia. He had gazed so often and so searchingly upon the faceless sketch for the picture that he could have no doubt that this indeed was the Celia he sought. There was the very dress itself, of a lilac white shade, worked with little sprigs of pink silk isolated and in lines. The throat was bare, the broad collar falling right away from the aperture to well beyond the shoulders in a

drooping line that suggested at once freshness and modesty. The very folds of the skirt had been preserved in the ridges and monticules, since the stuff had been starched and ironed into the precise radiations that Mr. Hitchcock needed. The little basket was there at Celia's feet, of a straw-work so delicate and minute that it resembled the fineness of a cream-jug; the broad hat, slung from her bare arm by great pink ribbons, resembled in the straight flow of its lines a great, pale palm-leaf; and the left arm, to which the hat hung, crossed her bosom and her heart, the left depending so that the small, plump hand rested half hidden in a fold of the stiff dress. • And looking at her face he perceived that it would exactly fill the outline of the space that had been left white and blank upon his canvas.

It filled up a void; it afforded him an intense satisfaction for his curiosity and an irresistible conviction. He removed his hat from beneath his arm, and, extending it to some six inches in a lateral direction from his right hip, exclaimed—

“Madam, I have the honour to salute Celia in an Arbour.” He glanced up at the thorn-tree upon whose bole she was resting. If it had not spread above her so brown and so umbrageous as the foliage that Mr. Hitchcock had given to his picture, he was nevertheless well content. For he was aware that painters must beautify natural objects, and that such trees as you shall see in paintings are neither upon the earth nor in the seas. But shadow fell across her, which was of itself enough to complete the resemblance; though behind her, inartistically, nature had spread a sward of green all-blazing with sun-

light, across which there stepped slowly a herd of pale deer, their coats seeming to focus and to reflect the light; and in lieu of the broad ray that Mr. Hitchcock had sent to illumine his sitter's features and form, a single beam filtered through the thorn-leaves and played, shivering tenuously, upon the bright filaments of her dark hair, upon her bare shoulder, and to be reflected upwards upon the brown ovals of her left cheek.

"La! Mr. Bettesworth," she said, "how can you be so certain that I am Celia? To be sure, I do not know it my own self."

"But!" Mr. Bettesworth said, "do you not know what cloths you have sat for?"

Her face expressed a guileless and charming stupidity.

"And how should I?" she said. "Here sit I, and there standeth he, peaking and squinting at my face over his glasses and through 'em and then with an underlook. And 'a painteth and 'a hath un's paintings framed, always its back to me, so how should I know if I be Celia or not Celia, for I have never seen his pieces? But I go to him through a tunnel that stretcheth from the pot-room to the temple, and I sit monstrous still, nor may I so much as gawp nor yawn be the fit never so strong. And old Mr. Hitchcock is for all the world like a badger or a hedgehog at the bottom of a burrow, and it is all my life is worth to speak to him. So he will growl and spit, but when he comes out again he will stick comfits in my mouth and buss me, and be for all the world like old Tom the plough-horse when he is turned into the cloverfield."

Mr. Bettesworth placed his hat that was so loaded with gold lace upon the gold lace that covered his heart. He inclined himself in a formal manner, and said, with a carefully built up reverence of tone—

"Madam, I have to beg of you that you will accept, firstly, my escort up to London; then hospitality; thirdly, my invitation to dine with the Right Honourable the Society of the Difettanti, and fourthly, my hand in marriage."

The large straw hat dropped to the ground, the virginal mouth fell wide apart, the left hand clenched itself suddenly over the heart.

"God help me!" she exclaimed, "you will make a fine lady of me! Shall I have little patches cut like a coach and four horses, with the coachman's whip and four horses on my right cheek?"

The multitudinous prospect, and this realization of incredible ambitions in tiny matters, overwhelmed her for a moment. She started to her feet, her hands half stretched out as if in invocation; her mouth still fell open. "But after all, why not?" she suddenly resumed. "Am I not livelier and comelier than any washed-out City madam? I do not need your dyes and your cosmetics for my cheeks, nor your eye-brights nor your lip salves. And there is a hundred thousand or more pounds to gain by it. And I thought you must affect me from the first!" And suddenly she cast herself upon him, her hands clasping upon the tie of his wig, from which the powder disengaged itself and filtered in a little cloud into the sunlight.

"Oh, my benefactor!" she exclaimed. "Will I

marry you? Why, I would marry ten of you and eight more for luck!"

Mr. Bettsworth, moving his head stiffly back, attempted to disengage himself, and to explain that the offer of marriage should be accompanied by a forfeit if he failed to perform the undertaking; but she clung to him so that for the moment he could not get his breath. The dark face of the Signora Poppæa, her blinking, ironic, and amused expression, came before his eyes. Once more he regretted that he had forgotten her prescription. He wished he had counted forty before he had spoken; he wished he had more exactly rounded off his speech.

PART III

I

MR. BETTESWORTH displayed upon his features no marked triumph or elation, when, to eat supper with Major Penruddock and Mr. Harcourt, he entered the inn-yard of the Turk's Head. But the yard, in the falling dusk, appeared to be unusually filled with men who were not horsemen; a pike gleamed in the lantern-light beneath one gallery, and a couple of musket-barrels beneath another. From a certain subdued buzz that went up upon his arriving, Mr. Bettesworth imagined that the town had heard of his wager, as of his success, and was applauding his victorious entry. But the noise was hushed with whispers, and he rode through a silence to the inn-door. He had dressed himself with more than usual care, so that the light, falling upon him from within, revealed him beneath his riding-cloak, which was cast back upon one shoulder, as a scintillation of gold lace, of purple velvet, of white ruffles; and, beneath his hat, his hair was powdered till it was a snowy white. Behind him Mr. Roland was very gay in scarlet and gold; and even Mr. Williamson shone in a riding-suit of blue and silver, which Mr. Bettesworth had presented

to him from his own wardrobe in satisfaction at his discovery and defence of Celia. The host bowed more double than ever before him; the servants crowded into the dim, flagged hall to peer over each other's shoulders at his erect and engrossed figure. He observed that when his eyes lit upon them the faces of the wenches expressed as much fear as admiration. One of them, standing in the shadow of a fat cook, gave a little scream, which she stifled at once with the corner of her apron.

Gratified by these sights and sounds, Mr. Bettesworth entered a small room at the end of the passage. He wore an air of modest satisfaction, which he had carefully studied before his glass for some three-quarters of an hour before setting out upon his expedition. His blond features were composed and serene; his lips were even pressed together, as if he came to announce news that was grave rather than triumphant. With an equal gravity Major Penruddock greeted them. Mr. Harcourt, on the other hand, whilst bowing, averted his glance. The cloth was laid and the candles lighted, but as yet no meats were upon the board. They stood and conversed as to the weather, as to the inconvenience of town dress for riding in the country, as to how the Major and Mr. Harcourt felt after last night's wine. And Mr. Bettesworth, whilst lamenting that a too great press of business had prevented his waiting upon them before they had taken their departure, very earnestly pressed upon them the praises of a pill invented by a Doctor Johns of Salisbury, which was sovereign for dispelling the humours of the morning after a night spent with the juice of the grape.

Mr. Bettesworth had very seriously enjoined upon Mr. Williamson that he should keep his mouth shut and display no undue elation. His intention was, when the cloth should be removed, and the time for toasting arrived, to give them that of Celia herself. Then he would display to them her consent in writing to go with him to Town, to accept his hospitality, to be present at a dinner of the Dilettante Society, and, finally, to take his hand in marriage. This letter he had had to write with his own hand, for Lydia could do no more than make the merest of pothooks, with her tongue following round her lips the motions of her pen.

But once in the company of his equals, Mr. Williamson's obedience dissolved. He was unable to resist grinning at Major Penruddock, making a hideous grimace at Mr. Harcourt's averted features, and winking with contortions of his whole face at Mr. Roland, who stood with him behind his brother. And it was evident to Mr. Bettesworth that the contest of the morning had left a certain stiffness between all these gentlemen. Only Mr. Roland, who, with his gallant *insouciance*, was disengaging a strand of his coat lace from the hilt of his sword, seemed entirely at his ease.

But then, Mr. Bettesworth reflected, that was not difficult, since it was Mr. Roland who had held his horse-pistol to the Major's stomach, a remembrance that might well make both the Major and Mr. Harcourt experience unpleasant emotions. He imagined that these would disappear before the first taste of venison and the first bottle of Burgundy. His quick ear caught, too, the sound of many and

heavy footsteps on the flags outside the door. There came an occasional thump as of a heavy body or a metal-bound staff. Mr. Bettsworth interpreted these signs as meaning that the two gentlemen, acknowledging their failure, had ordered unusual preparations to be made for his entertainment. They were acknowledging defeat in a spirit of generosity, and he was to be saluted as a conquering hero. This filled him with satisfaction, and the more so in that he would be able to announce to them that by not carrying out his marriage with Lydia Chuckel, he would be forfeiting the reward for his wager and retaining only the glory of success. And he began suddenly to wonder how Lady Eshetsford could have assured him that he would find the original of Celia in every wit as desirable as herself. He could give Lady Eshetsford credit for a critical taste; he must now believe her to be as modest as she was noble. For if Lydia were, indeed, as she might be called, a small replica of her aunt by blood—if her eyes, her lips, her chin, her cheeks, her hair were, indeed, exactly her aunt's, she was a small piece, she had quick little motions, and none of the pigeon-like parade and grace of Lady Eshetsford's grand manner. She used her firm, white teeth upon sweetmeats like a little ape or a grinning negro boy. And Mr. Bettsworth, having settled in his mind that when this matter of the wager was at rest he would send Lydia down to Winterbourne Longa to be at the instruction of the Signora Poppæa—having settled this, Mr. Bettsworth fell into a sudden reverie upon the charms of Lady Eshetsford. He stood in a silence*unconventional but impressive.

In the small room the candles burnt motionless, and with long flames, above the tablecloth. The noises from without increased, so that there appeared to be an army of cooks ready to do their duties. Major Penruddock gazed over his shoulder as if with an angry hint to Mr. Harcourt; and Mr. Harcourt, his face very pale, avoided the Major's eye.

And suddenly Mr. Jack Williamson burst out with a horse-laugh—

"I will get me a suit of canary yellow. I am of the same complexion as Mr. Harcourt, and this colour, as I saw this morning, admirably becomes him."

At this reference to the encounter of the morning Mr. Bettesworth scowled upon his retainer. It appeared to him that this must cause at least an instant challenge between all the four gentlemen. And suddenly the Major, tired of frowning and blinking at his ally, said roundly—

"Mr. Harcourt, I think you have a message to communicate to Mr. Bettesworth."

"But, surely," Mr. Bettesworth said, almost cordially, for he felt at peace with his kind, "business will wait till after supper?"

"We shall eat," Major Penruddock said grimly, "with the better appetite if this is first dispatched."

Mr. Bettesworth replied that he was at Mr. Harcourt's service.

He walked stiffly to the door, Mr. Harcourt waiting upon him with a mien in which pallor and effrontery were equally mingled.

Major Penruddock opened the door very smartly, and smartly closed it behind them. For the

moment there was a dead silence. The Major stood with his back to the door, his arms crossed akimbo. And suddenly there went up a huge outcry. It was compounded of cries, oaths, shuffling of footsteps, and the shrieks of women. It shook the candles in their sockets; it reverberated through the whole small room; it swelled to enormous proportions; it took the aspect of multi-voiced cheers in the hundred echoes of the stone-flagged hall. And then, slowly, it died down; it receded; it became a sustained buzz, rising now and again, and again falling to a level.

"Gentlemen," Major Penruddock said to his guests, "God be thanked, the country is saved, and the town of Ashford may sleep in its beds to-night. The Jacobite Duke of Berwick is taken!"

II

WHEN the door closed behind him, the first thing that assailed Mr. Bettsworth was, in an almost impenetrable darkness, the stench of humanity. And then hands that seemed to be all thumbs, and to be of enormous weight, were laid upon him. This outrage affected him as if it were something incredible. An enormous and bewildering noise went up; there was hardly any light in a passage packed with human beings like cattle in a stack-yard, and all crying out. His hands were pinned to his side by the bodies of other men, his questions were inaudible in their outcry. It was all so utterly beyond belief, and beyond imagination, that his senses seemed to refuse their functions. Accustomed to command, he was in the grip of a force whose very nature was unknown to him. Accustomed to think at his leisure, he had suddenly nothing to think of. He was used to being solitary in large rooms, to thinking himself godlike and set apart from the common herd; he found himself suddenly in the dark, pressed up against the vilest creatures, who offended his every sense. His stomach turned within him. He saw, as if in silhouettes, the cock of hats, the gleam of pikes, and the faces of men inspired by panic and by

execration. He was jammed against a wall so that his spine seemed to be compressed; a hard object smote him upon the mouth, and his lips and chin suddenly grew wet; the ribbon being torn from his queue, locks of hair fell across his face. He became blind; his wrists were pinioned by hands behind his back; he was pushed forward, hurtling against other men's bodies; and the intolerable babel of voices swelled and swelled.

He had, at last, a sensation of standing solitary. Gyves, he realized, were clapped upon his wrists. Then his wig was pulled back from over his eyes. He was breathless, he was enraged beyond measure; an enormous ball seemed to gather in his throat, so that he choked.

Mr. Justice Stareleigh and Mr. Justice Wyndham Bestwell stood with their heads together in the extreme inner corner of the Ordinary Room. Mr. Bestwell was so tiny and so jaundiced in the face that he resembled a yellow dwarf. Mr. Stareleigh, who kept harriers, had a face the colour of his copper horn; his wig was knotted and tasselled like a coachman's, his stomach resembled a bag-pudding, and his legs were so bandy that a full foot and a half of wainscoting showed between his knees. Mr. Bestwell kept the gilt knob of his cane perpetually beside his mouth. He talked incessantly in a high, outraged voice, leaning his mouth to Mr. Stareleigh's ear and gesticulating with his left hand, so that he resembled a soldier in the smoke of battle. Mr. Bettsworth was stood in the centre of the long room, between four fat and agitated

men holding enormous pikes and unlit horn-lanterns. His hands were manacled behind his back, his blue coat was torn from neck to knee his gold lace hung in shreds all over the garment; his sword was gone, his scabbard broken, his wig lay at his feet; and from his broken lip there ran down a stream of black blood that dripped upon his neck-ruffles and his waistcoat. And upon him all the faces in the room were turned with looks of panic, of execration, of savage joy, and of leering cruelty. The crowd at the bottom of the room was kept in place by one of the Ordinary tables. There were men of all shapes and sizes—smugglers lacking eyes, farmers with wigs of horsehair, drawers in their shirt-sleeves, an apothecary with a black patch over his eye, a farrier who had brought his sledge-hammer with which to protect himself; and shaking Ben, a palsied wretch dressed in fragments of fishing-net knotted together with string, one of the shoulders entirely bare and begrimed with cow-dung, his face expressing a leering joy, his right hand brandishing a marrow-bone which, in the confusion, he had stolen from the kitchen.

All these faces expressed a panic-stricken joy at the arrest of a public enemy, and a malignant regret that he had been taken out of their hands, so that they could not tear him limb from limb.

And so stunned was Mr. Bettesworth by the blows that he had received, and so unthinkable to him was his position, that he found no word at all to say. It was as if, for the moment, he had been visited by a stroke of apoplexy. He did not even understand that he had been arrested on a warrant

from the two Justices. It would have been impossible for him to imagine that he could be arrested; rather his mind ran dimly on riots and seditious tumults. He imagined himself in the hands of bandits,—possibly of a band of smugglers who would hold him for ransom,—and he tried to look round to see how Mr. Harcourt had fared. But at his first inclination to make a movement his guards seized his shoulders with airs of extraordinary emotion, and shouted in his ears ferocious threats. He remembered, indeed, Lydia Chuckel's warnings of the night before; he remembered, too, Mr. Chuckel's perturbation of the morning; and at that moment Mr. Chuckel himself, pushing out from the crowd of wretches at the bottom of the room, crossed his line of vision, and, hatless and perspiring, ran to the top of the room and began to whisper to the ill-assorted pair who were continuing their excited but smothered colloquy. Mr. Bettsworth imagined that these two must be the head of the gang of smugglers, and that Mr. Harcourt must have heard them; but almost immediately afterwards—his clothes a little ruffled by the pressure of the crowd, but grinning obliquely—Mr. Harcourt passed him also, and when he was level with Mr. Bettsworth he held his handkerchief to his face to hide a spasm of laughter. Then slowly something of a revelation came to Mr. Bettsworth's mind, and having now an object upon which it could fittingly vent itself, rage arose in Mr. Bettsworth's heart. He remembered that the night before Mr. Harcourt and the Major, to his own knowledge, had been in secret conclave with Chuckel upon the terrace.

Mr. Harcourt, too, with his constrained manner, had accompanied him out of the room, and had done it at the bidding of Major Penruddock. It appeared to him absolutely plain that these two, in conjunction with the defaulting steward, had taken advantage of the lawlessness and inaccessibility of that place to call upon the smugglers and desperadoes to remove him, at any rate for a time. The like had been done even in his own Wiltshire, and in the town of Wilton, not so many years ago, and Kent was renowned for its lawlessness. It had its colonies of Jesuits; it had many refugees from the wrath of the law in other countries; its smugglers were notorious, its highway men the most formidable that England produced; it was infested with French and Jacobite spies. Thus it appeared to him to be certain that he had been captured by one or the other kind of outlaw.

A measure of silence fell upon the room when it was observed that Mr. Justice Bestwell was leaving the little group of four to approach the prisoner. He walked in a singular and prancing manner, kicking up his lean knees and swaying his cane for all the world like a drum-major. His coat-skirts and his hat were alike of enormous dimensions, so that he had the air of being pressed down into the floor. He pressed the porcelain apple that formed the head of his cane to the side of his jaw, and asked, in an extraordinary, perturbed manner, if Mr. Bettesworth had anything to say.

Mr. Bettesworth had some difficulty in speaking, for his lip was very much contused, and his breath came with such rage through his nostrils that he

was in danger of bursting a blood-vessel. It was the sight of Mr. Harcourt's laughter that had so unnerved him. And that he might not render himself ridiculous by imprecations and by threats that, for the moment, he had no power to put into execution, he remained stark silent and reflected. This silence threw the little Justice into an intolerable panic.

"If you will not speak," he said, "we must put you to the torture." He turned his head over his shoulder and squeaked—

"He! brother Stareleigh, must he not be put to the torture?"

Mr. Stareleigh's bandy knees trembled so much that he, too, had a difficulty in finding utterance.

Mr. Harcourt said, with his humorous, persuasive manner—

"Oh, come! This is no trial. This is only a capture. You have no right to make him plead if he will not. Let him be taken away and clapped up, and there an end of it."

Having counted forty, Mr. Bettesworth spoke—

"Sir," he said to Mr. Bestwell, who quivered at the sound of his voice, "upon this outrage against my person I have no comments to make, but when I am rescued Mr. Harcourt will know what he has to await. As for yourself, I will say this: that I will use every penny that I possess to get you hanged. And if the Government cannot come at you, I will raise men to do it, even though it should be five troops of horse."

These words, which were plainly audible throughout the room, raised anew a tremendous clamour;

so that every fist and every weapon in the room were brandished towards Mr. Bettesworth. For every man there imagined that Mr. Bettesworth was the Duke of Berwick, and that he had near by, in the marshes, a huge troop of Jacobite soldiers who were marching upon the town to set flames to it, to murder all the townsmen, and to establish there the headquarters of King James. And in the midst of this tumult Mr. Bettesworth was dragged away by his guards, pushed through a door into the inn-garden, and so dragged up the street; whilst a crowd, pouring out of the other entrance, fell over each other's legs in a desperate rush towards the Round House, where Mr. Bettesworth was to be interned. The two Justices of the Peace remained with Mr. Chuckel and Mr. Harcourt, solitary in the large room.

"Sirs," Mr. Harcourt said, with his simper, "by this night's work you shall have made yourselves the most famous men in England. King George, himself, will shower blessings upon you; and no doubt you shall be made Knights of the Shire, or Peers of the Realm, and have all the honours that you can stomach."

"But," said Mr. Bestwell, "what if the Duke be indeed rescued and we all hanged? It will be many hours before the military arm can come down from Canterbury to strike at the rebels in the marshes. Nay, who knows even where these rebels are? For some say that they are here and some say they are there."

"Sir," Mr. Harcourt said, "I think you may very quietly rest in your beds. For upon the news that

this Duke of Berwick is taken all his forces will vanish in the thin air as if they had never been."

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Justice Stareleigh, "would it not be a very wise precaution if we should guard well the spot where we lie, and call all the able-bodied men that we may to surround our house?"

"Sir," Mr. Harcourt said, with polite inattention, "it would be excellent! Excellent!"

He had perceived that Mr. Roland Bettesworth and Mr. Williamson had entered the far end of the room. He looked with apprehension at Mr. Chuckel, at the Justices, and at the open door that led into the dark garden. But immediately behind the two gentlemen came Major Penruddock. Mr. Williamson was laughing consumedly, so that he rolled in his stride.

"So," he said, "you have taken Old Ramrod for the Duke of Berwick! Egad, here's a pretty, humorous, drunken pickle!"

Mr. Roland, however, was more serious, inasmuch as he expected that when he again found his brother, Mr. Bettesworth would be overcome by a cold and impetuous rage which might well be visited upon all around him.

"Sirs," he said to the magistrates, "I do not know what you have done to Mr. Bettesworth, but you have been right royally fooled, and it is like to cost you a pretty penny."

Mr. Bestwell and Mr. Stareleigh both attempted to speak at once; the one in high tones, the other in very low. They fell silent; and then Mr. Chuckel, his hard blue eyes seeming to shower contempt and triumph upon Mr. Roland's face, said unctuously—

"Sir, since this gentleman, Mr. Harcourt, of His Majesty's Private Council, has sworn that this traitor is the Duke of Berwick, and since we have her ladyship's letter to prove it——"

"Gadzooks!" Mr. Roland exclaimed. "Her ladyship's letter!"

"Sir," Mr. Chuckel said, "her ladyship's letter said that this man was her cousin, and sure all the world knows that her ladyship is a cousin to the Duke of Berwick——"

"Sir," Mr. Justice Bestwell shrieked suddenly, "I do not know who you may be, or by what authority you question us, but look upon the inside of this wig."

Mr. Bestwell had, indeed, rescued Mr. Bettesworth's wig from the floor; for being an economical man, and having, moreover, a taste for very large garments, this covering, whose locks would have fallen almost to his buttocks, appeared to him of supreme desirability. He held out the red satin lining towards Mr. Roland. Upon this, that it might be more easily identified when taken to the barber's, there had been embroidered a capital letter "B" in gleaming gold, and above it Mr. Bettesworth's crest, which was a wild-cat rampant.

"Sir," Mr. Bestwell said, "what should this letter and this device mean but that its owner is the Duke of Berwick? For Berwick is in Scotland, and the Duke claims to be a royal Duke of Scotland; and this lion rampant, what is it but the Arms of Scotland, as all may see it upon the Arms of our beloved Lord the King ever since the blessed day of union between the kingdoms?"

"Sir," Mr. Roland said, "the beast is a wild-cat."

"And what," Mr. Bestwell asked triumphantly, "is a lion but a wild-cat?"

"And remember," Mr. Chuckel continued, "again, the phrasing of her ladyship's letter where her ladyship commends me upon my head to look after the comfort of this man as if he were the King or his brother. What is this but to say that this is a Royal personage, come to prepare the way for the king from over the water?"

"And," Mr. Bestwell said, "he did utter the most horrible threats of having me hanged; of raising troops of horse; of devastating the country. Who could do such things but a usurper?"

"Why," Mr. Roland said, "this is a very good hearing, for since this gentleman is so near akin to me, I, also, must be demonstrably a royal Duke, for, you have proved it very satisfactorily upon my brother."

Mr. Justice Stareleigh's mind moved with some slowness if with considerable ferocity. He had by now arrived at the comprehension of the fact that these were strangers.

"Who be you to question the Justices?" he rumbled, with a deep fury, from his stomach. "Kiss my wig! I will show you what Justices be in Kent. I will commit you. I will commit you all. I am in a very committing frame of mind, and will have Habeas-corpus burnt by the town-crier;" and his voice died away into a rumble of obscene ejaculations.

"Brother Stareleigh," Mr. Justice Bestwell exclaimed, "I think that is a very fine idea. I think

you have the right of it. How can we tell that these are not officers of the Duke's force now in the marshes?"

Mr. Chuckel commented suddenly —

"Your Worships, that I would have had all along. For these gentlemen came also with the Duke from I know not where, descending, as it appeared, from heaven, but coming, of a truth, from the King of France's dominions."

"Ha!" Mr. Justice Bestwell exclaimed, "let us arrest them at once. Let us send for paper and pens and sign the warrants."

"My friends," Mr. Roland exclaimed, "we are but two to five, but I think we can let a little blood before you make much pen play."

Mr. Chuckel slipped slowly behind the fat Justice. Mr. Harcourt anew, cast glances towards the garden door. Mr. Justice Stareleigh had not yet perceived the tenor of Mr. Roland's remarks, but with a scream of incredulous rage Mr. Bestwell suddenly drew his sword, which was a great deal too large for him.

"Ho!" he exclaimed, "shall we be threatened? Ho! we are swordsmen, too! Ho! I am a match for six Papists and French frogs!" And at each ejaculation he leapt into the air, feinted towards Mr. Roland's face, and uttered a shrill and ape-like cry of rage.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen," Major Penruddock exclaimed. "I beg your Worships to listen to me." He stepped with a business-like calm between Mr. Roland and the little Justice, whose sword he brushed aside with his hand. "This is a sad misunderstanding," he said. "It is lamentable to

see gentlemen fall out about follies." He looked gravely upon Mr. Bestwell and gravely upon Mr. Roland. He took a pinch of snuff whilst he marshalled his words, and reflected upon his course of action. To the one he said—

"Mr. Roland Bettesworth will understand that the inevitable is the inevitable. To pass a night or a day, or many days or a week, in the smelling Round House here, whilst his credentials are being inquired into, would help very little any cause he may have at heart. Yet Mr. Roland must perceive that to utter threats against Justices, or so to act as to cast suspicion upon themselves, must ensure such an incarceration, which I, for my part, am very willing to spare him." He turned with an equal gravity upon the two magistrates, and tapped the lid of his snuff-box. "Your Worships," he said, "I will answer for it with my life that neither of these gentlemen is a friend to the Duke of Berwick or mixed in his vile schemes. Mr. Harcourt will swear to the same thing, and Mr. Harcourt is of His Gracious Majesty's Privy Council." He waved his hat in a manner of introduction. "Your Worships," he said, "this is Mr. Roland Bettesworth; this, Mr. Jack Williamson; each of them well known to the Town, in their several ways, as the joviallest and most loyal subject His Majesty has. Each was long since known in the ties of friendship and acquaintance by Mr. Harcourt and myself, and if you have arrested your prisoner upon our evidence, by just such evidence, formally as we render it, you should release these gentlemen. Nay, more, in as far as you may, you should render them amends as

right-down jovial fellows to be kissed, slobbered over, and feasted."

Major Penruddock desired no more, now that Mr. Bettesworth was put out of the way, than a couple of hours of freedom of action. His work appeared to him, to all intents and purposes, to be at an end, and he had at once a certain good-nature that made him very undesirous of seeing gentlemen of his own rank mishandled, or of swearing falsely when it would not profit him. Moreover, the arrest of Mr. Bettesworth, though it might cause some stir, would yet be condoned as being all a portion of the wager. But needlessly to cause the incarceration of two gentlemen who profited in no way by the wager itself, would be very much to extend the affair. The Courts of Law might well take cognizance of it, and Mr. Penruddock had no desire to employ the greater portion or more of the winnings, which he seemed to feel already in his pockets, upon the payment of an immense fine. He cast about in his mind, whilst he was taking another pinch of snuff, for an expedient that should detain the two gentlemen for the two hours that he needed. He wanted them out of the way for that space of time; but he observed he had almost converted the Justices to setting them instantly free.

Mr. Chuckel, however, was by no means so resigned to their liberation. He dreaded, in the first place, their wrath; and, in the second, that their efforts might ensure the speedy liberation of Mr. Bettesworth. He ventured, therefore, to urge upon the Justices the fact that, for all Major Penruddock and Mr. Harcourt might be well acquainted with

these two gentlemen, nevertheless these were very treacherous times, and many great lords and others in London had been attainted for plotting with High Churchmen and the king over the water. It was indubitable that these gentlemen had come in the company of the prisoner. What possible errand, then, could have brought them to Ashford if they were not of the Jacobite party?

Major Penruddock suddenly bent his brows upon Mr. Chuckel.

"Sirrah," he growled tumultuously, "have I lived to see the day when a servant, an attorney's clerk, a marrier of kept mistresses, shall set his words up against mine?" He turned to the Justices. "Your Worships," he said, "this gentleman's errand, and he will bear me out, is a secret one, but not so very secret neither as that I may not breathe it before discreet ears. We are both upon the same errand. We are after a wench, and that is all there is to it. What the Duke of Berwick's errand to this town was, we know. And since his errand was to this town, and the wench dwells in this town,—nay, more, in the very house of Mr. Chuckel himself,—what more natural than that these gentlemen should become travelling companions, nay, very guests—as Mr. Harcourt and I have been—of the Duke himself."

At this point Mr. Stareleigh said—

"They came from nowhere with the Duke of Berwick!"—not so much because he was offering any objection to the Major's speech, as because it was only at that juncture that this information had reached his brain.

"Sirs," Major Penruddock said, "I will stake my

head—nay, I will risk my commission in His Majesty's Army; and so, I am sure, will Mr. Harcourt risk his upon the King's Privy Council—that these gentlemen have no concurrence in the designs of the Duke of Berwick."

He frowned at Mr. Harcourt, and that gentleman, although he had no particular inkling of the Major's designs, added obediently, in languid tones—

"Why, stap my vitals! if my old friends Roland Bettesworth and Jack Williamson are concerned in any treason with the Duke of Berwick, I will eat my iron fireback, dogs and all."

"Nay, more," Major Penruddock said; "Mr. Harcourt, as a Privy Councillor, is of higher judicial post and authority than any one else in this room, and he will command you by virtue of that position of authority to let these two gentlemen go in peace, and he will hold you absolved from any danger or responsibility that this may cause you."

"Why, so I will," Mr. Harcourt said. "I will absolve you from all responsibility, and I order you now to set these gentlemen at once at liberty."

"Why, not so very precipitately, friend Harcourt," the Major said; "let us make the more absolutely certain of this. Let these gentleman give their parole of honour to remain here three hours—or say till midnight—whilst we make search for the Duke's papers at the Manor-house, and then let them go free."

He grinned swiftly at Mr. Roland Bettesworth, who exclaimed beneath his breath, "Oh, the rogue!" and then asked aloud, "But if we will not give this parole?"

"Why, sirs," the Major said lightly, "this is the merest formality. But if you will not do it, then it is to be feared that you must to prison until we have completed our search of the Manor-house. For to object to this formality would seem to be, of itself, a *prima facie* of guilt, though I am very sure that you have no guilt at all. But we have our duties to perform."

"Why, they are fine, jovial fellows," Mr. Justice Stareleigh exclaimed at this point. "I am sure I never met none so fine, not even when I was in London Town seven years ago!"

"Well, you have us trapped!" Mr. Roland said to the Major. "But what will you do in the three hours of our parole?"

"Why," the Major said, with a pleasant smile, "it falls upon me, as a man of arms, to search Ashford Manor-house and, under commission from the hand of Mr. Harcourt, to take from there any person that we may suspect to be treasonably inclined, to be produced and examined in the City of London."

"By God! he will take Celia," Mr. Williamson exclaimed, "and all our labours are lost!"

"Mr. Williamson," the Major said gravely, "until the troops come from Canterbury, which they shall not do before to-morrow at noon, or I am no judge of troops, I am the military officer of highest command here, and, acting with the warrant of Mr. Harcourt, I will take who I will and when and how."

"Why, the game is up, bully boy," Mr. Williamson said. "There are a hundred armed men in the inn at this moment."

"But, Major," Mr. Bestwell interrupted, "what

dispositions will you make for our safety? For to your own knowledge there are twenty thousand Jacobites in arms upon the marsh. And we, as Justices, by the eminence of our position, shall be the first whom these blind brutes will attack."

"Why, it is very true," Major Penruddock said, "that you will be in some danger if they should make a move, though this I hardly expect, inasmuch as their leader is clapped up in jail. But the disposition of the land is this: you, Mr. Bestwell, live upon the north-east of the town, and you, Mr. Stareleigh, upon the north-west. I should therefore counsel you to divide such men as you have,—which I understand to be the number of a hundred in arms,—to divide them into two bodies, and to set out for your homes, retaining them for your protection. And for my part, if I perceive any movements during my reconnaissances I will send messengers to you to say that the Jacobites are afoot and that you may flee to the hills. But stay here till midnight with these two gentlemen; eat the supper that has been prepared for ourselves, crack with them as many bottles of wine as you will, and be merry. And at midnight I will come again and give you news of how all fares to the south-east of the town."

"Why, I could crack a bottle of wine," Mr. Justice Stareleigh said. "I could crack many bottles of wine. I am very much in the mind for wine and company."

"But," Mr. Bestwell said, "supposing these Jacobites should march round you and come in upon us while you are gone?" •

“Sir,” the Major answered, “I have had so much practice of war in the Low Countries that I am a past-master of reconnoitring; I can so throw out vedettes, scouts, skirmishers, night-posts, and dark horsemen, that I am very certain no Jacobite shall get past me. Nay, you may eat and drink and sleep as sound as if no Jacobite were in Kent—and this were all a dream of them.”

III

MR. BETTESWORTH was in a circular, blind, stone cell that was some thirty feet across. The floor was ankle deep in black and stinking straw. A lantern hung from the green and slimy wall, and gave out an odour of rancid oil, and the light was so yellow and dim that it hardly pierced to the end of the cell that faced the iron-studded door. There were no windows, the stone arches of the roof contained no aperture, and the stench of the apartment was so terrible that, upon being thrown into it, Mr. Bettesworth was violently sick. Past his convulsed ears there went a perpetual sound of stertorous breathing, at intervals a whining like the whimpering of a small monkey, and at other intervals words were moaned that resolved themselves into the phrase: "Oh, accursed generation!" And as, gradually, Mr. Bettesworth's senses reasserted themselves, he perceived shapes so hideous that he imagined himself to be in hell. He was still near the door, and at the farther end, upon the straw, was the shape of a young woman half naked, her bare back covered with grime from the floor and with clots of blood. Her head was upon the lap of another, whose matted, grey hair fell across a face begrimed with tears and ancient dirt. Her hands were like claws. They

groped from time to time at her scalp, and she sent out a feeble whimpering.

Against the wall, all in black, with his arms crossed and his legs thrust into the straw before him, stood the figure of a man. The lantern-light shone on his dry, long, and twisted features; his broad-rimmed hat was pulled down upon his eyes, that glittered and stared straight before him.

"What place is this?" Mr. Bettesworth asked hoarsely.

The man groaned, the elder woman whimpered, but the stertorous breathing of the younger ceased for a moment.

"Have faith," the man groaned 'hollowly; "miserable sinner, wretched criminal, find conversion now. Glory! Glory!"

"In the name of God, what place is this?" Mr. Bettesworth asked again.

"This is England—a Christian land," the Methodist said with a deep irony.

"But, sir," Mr. Bettesworth said, "is it possible that they should incarcerate so many?"

For his mind ran upon the fact that this was some smugglers' cavern, and that he and the others were being held for ransom somewhere in the bowels of the earth.

The Methodist's eyes glinted round upon the occupants of the confined space.

"Friend," he said, but with a bitter contempt, "do you call this so many when we are but four? God help me, we are but a very small consignment, and this place is at a very low ebb.* For it is usual to have ten or twelve wretches in this hole; and if

you will go up and down the length and breadth of England, you will find thousands of such—nay, tens of thousands and hundreds.”

Mr. Bettesworth gazed at him with bewilderment and horror. The prostitute began to breathe again, and the rattling sound of her breath rolled round the moulded stones.

“A’s time has come,” the other woman whimpered. “A’s time has come, and I hev’ naught but took sticks from Squire’s hedge.”

“I do not understand,” Mr. Bettesworth said, almost pitifully. “These are all dark sayings.”

“Friend,” the Methodist said, “who are you, that you should not understand; or where do you dwell, that these should be dark sayings to you? For I tell you that this is England, a Christian land that is like ripe fruit, of a great outward beauty and ruddiness, but all rotten within. Yes, within all stinketh; and again I ask you, who are you that do not understand, and that find these sayings dark? For here, but that the fair seemliness of the surface is neither visible nor in evidence, you have an epitome of all this land. In this harlot, with the death-rattle in her throat, having been beaten at the cart-tail and lying in filth, you have personified the carnal lusts of all the land, which, in spite of all premonitions, persist unto death itself amidst foul stench and filthy garbage, unto eternal torture. And in this other woman you see those who go scratching upon this teeming earth for the bare portion of a beggar, and to raise a roof of rushes over their heads. Until at the last gasp, with their sides caved in and their bodies naked, you find them thus bewildered in the

doings of this world. For upon the one hand, by adherence to virtue, they starve and rot in the straw, and are clapped up for the taking of a few sticks from the hedges of the great ones of this world. And upon the other hand, if they should forsake virtue and toil, and by the sale of their bodies, or the bowing to temporary lusts, they procure the wherewithal to live or the means of oblivion—if so they do, they see that here they end. Now what shall these poor folk do?—for for the rich there is no account nor hope of salvation, since they take their tolls, a thousand poor folk going to the sustenance of one such. And they fill their bellies with fat meats, and blind their eyes with gawds and trinkets, and the sparkle of gold and the shine of silk. But what shall these poor folk do, since they find in this world ease neither in what is accounted virtue in this world, nor in what is accounted filthiness and vice in this world and all the worlds that shall follow?”

He moved before the lantern, so that his form cast a blackness upon the whole cell. He caught Mr. Bettesworth by the shoulder and pointed one arm, stiff like a semaphore, to the apex of the place.

“Filthy sinner,” he exclaimed, in a voice that mounted and mounted in tone, “there is but one thing that availeth in this world. Have faith! Virtue shall not avail you, nor vice shall not stop up your ears. In this England there be three hundred and sixty jails that yawn alike for the one and the other, and that avail nothing. My poor, miserable brother, a flame of fire shall consume all England.

There shall but one thing avail: instant conversion. Have faith! Now! At once! There is no time! The flame of fire is coming! Coming now! Coming down from Heaven! Heaven!!”

He shook Mr. Bettesworth by the arm that he had seized, his hand waved over his head. His voice rose higher and higher, into an incoherent scream, and suddenly there mingled with it another scream, so high and so potent that Mr. Bettesworth chafed the skin on his wrists in the effort to tear his hands from the manacles and to thrust them to his ears. From the obscurity that the Wesleyan's figure caused there came invisibly deep pantings and violent rustlings. The screams continued to resound and drowned his voice. He bent ~~to~~ ^{to} peer forward, and the light from the lantern fell over his shoulder. Mr. Bettesworth saw dimly the last motions of a convulsed struggle. The old woman had been thrust backwards against the wall, and crouched like an ape, her arms amongst the straw. The girl lay with her face to them, the hair fallen back, the features begrimed and contused, a thin trickle of black blood running from the corner of the mouth into the black straw. She was absolutely immobile.

“Merciful God!” Mr. Bettesworth said, “what is this?”

The old woman, who had been thrown against the wall by the girl's last struggle, crawled slowly forward with an air of caution, as of one who approaches a dangerous beast. She extended an arm that was grey and lean, like the enlarged claw of a bird, and slowly fumbled into the girl's neck till her hand

rested on the heart. She said, "Well, well, well!" and gazed at the lantern with bleared eyes.

"Merciful God!" Mr. Bettesworth repeated, "what is this?"

"The harlot is dying or dead," the Methodist, said.

Horror overcame Mr. Bettesworth; he stammered incoherent things, trying to say, "Shall a Christian soul die thus?" and "Knock upon the door! Call out for help!" and at last, "Will you not send for a chaplain? There is no wretch so mean—no country so barbarous——"

"Friend," the Methodist said harshly, "I have been now but two years a field-preacher and have been cast but eleven times into jail, and in that time I have seen nine men and women die without the help of a chaplain. They died very well without that help, for what can these sluggard and indifferent men do towards the saving of a soul?"

"Sir," Mr. Bettesworth said, "that is a matter for the magistrates. It concerns in nowise our condition."

The preacher had refolded his arms and leant once more against the wall.

"Prisons in nowise concern us," Mr. Bettesworth said, "but only the lawless scoundrels who have here shut us in."

"Friend," the preacher said, "you may well—though it is not the mode—call them lawless that have here imprisoned us. For I am here right against the law, since the Act against Nonconformists—even if I were a Nonconformist—is annually suspended, and I have neither brawled nor taken

purses, nor done aught save preach the Word of God. And of a great majority of the poor people that are cast into jail it is likely that the most part are such as have incurred the ill-will of magistrates rather than the just ire of the law——”

“Sir,” Mr. Bettesworth said, “I cannot well hear these doctrines, considering my rank and position in the land; and it seems to me that, rather than debate upon such matters, we should do what we could to succour the poor wretch that lies there.”

“Friend,” the Methodist said, “the harlot is dead; and if she were not, what could we do to succour her, since your hands are chained behind your back, and there is not, nor will be till the morning, so much as a crock of water in this place? ~~And as~~ for your position or rank in the country, I do not know what it may be, but if you were even a magistrate it might very well benefit you to know how you send poor wretches to jail for the picking of a few sticks from your hedgerows, because they have incurred your displeasure by being not supple enough in backbone, or because they have taken a hare from the furrow, or a plover from the uplands; it might very well benefit you to know to what hells it is that you condemn at a nod of your head, and how those fare whose miserable superfluity maintains you in your great halls.”

“Sir,” Mr. Bettesworth said, “I am a magistrate of my County.”

“Oh, my poor brother,” the Methodist said, “is this a place or a time for vainglorious boasting and buffoonery? I have seen others such as you—highwaymen and footpads—so talking on the night

they were taken ; but oh, in a very little time they will change you their tune, as the rope comes nearer to their necks. Oh, my sinful brother, it is then, it is then that they will listen to my ministrations that before cast upon me the straw and stones of a prison-yard !”

“Sir,” Mr. Bettesworth said, with a return of spirit, “your talk of prisons and of prison-yards is offensive to me, for this, assuredly, is no prison but a den of thieves, and our business is not so much to debate of things that concern you little, and of which you know less,—for what can you know of the high state of a magistrate, or of the polity of a nation and its laws?—but rather we should lay our heads together to consider of how we may escape from this place and bring some succour to these poor wretches.”

“Sir,” the Methodist said dryly, “your head is softer than your heart, which, I thank God, is softer than in most of your kidney. For thus in the course of our stay here I may bring you to see the light, for I have seldom known a highwayman or a footpad who had compassion on such poor dross. But these walls here are nine foot thick, of solid stone, there are no windows or apertures, and before the door doubtless stands an armed guard ; so that I would have you to compose your mind, and set it upon other matters, until the rope claims you for its own.”

“Sir,” Mr. Bettesworth said, “your mind rambles, which is pardonable if you have been long here enclosed. But without doubt you will tell me what manner of place this is and where situated, that I

may consider for myself what chance I have of escape, or how long it shall be before my men may come to my rescue. I beg, therefore, that you will compose your mind and give me a civil answer to these questions. And then, if you be, as I should not wonder, without means to obtain redress, when we have come out from the clutches of these villains be sure my purse shall be open to you."

"Friend," the Methodist said, "for the place, it is the common jail of the town of Ashford; and for its situation, it standeth at the far end of the market-place, midway between the stocks, the pound, and the ducking-pond."

IV

MR. JUSTICE STARELEIGH, having bolted an immense plateful of venison and cherry-sauce, and having imbibed a full half-bottle of French brandy, struck his enormous fist upon the table, and addressed to Mr. Roland Bettesworth, who sat opposite him, the words—

“~~Sir~~ Robert will drag us all to the devil. To hell with Walpole and peace!”

Mr. Roland laughed, and raised his glass.

“Why, to hell with him with all my heart!” he repeated.

Mr. Bestwell, who in spite of his diminutive stature was a trencherman even more for the table than his brother Justice, laid down his knife and fork to say—

“I am with the young bloods. This peace is ruining us. We have had peace now this twenty year, if I do not mistake. When I was young it was different; it was all wars, bloody wars. Now we rot and moulder and grow fat. Why, I could lead a regiment myself!”

Mr. Roland was very concerned to keep Mr. Williamson at least half sober. And whilst Mr. Williamson was reaching over with a candle to singe the hind wig of Mr. Stareleigh, Mr. Roland carefully poured fresh water into his brandy.

"Aye!" Mr. Bestwell commented, "when I was young—not that I am so very old—I could singe a wig with any blade. Why, I could do it still. I will wager that I singe both your wigs before we rise from the table. I am such a one as few others be. I should be a mohock, there should be no man safe where I should pass."

"Aye," Mr. Roland said, "we could do with you well in the Town of London. 'Tis grown a deadly quiet place, with too little of frolic and fuss."

Mr. Stareleigh exclaimed once more: "To hell with Sir Robert Walpole, who will give us all wooden shoes!" and then fell forward on his plate.

"Aye," Mr. Bestwell repeated, "Sir Robert will give us all wooden shoes. For whilst here we moulder the French make preparations against us, and exercise themselves in all the arts of war. I have long been certain of this, and if I come to London I will make Sir Robert and the Ministers dance to the tune of 'The Shaking of the Sheets,' for I have warned many, and all and sundry, that this peace would be the ruin of us. What are Frenchmen for but to be warred upon, and Ministers but to find occasions for war? And here you find flat proof of what I have preached. Sir, there is not one man in this country that would not have a war, and this plaguy Minister is all for peace and the excise."

Mr. Stareleigh attempted to rise from his plate and to shout "To hell with the excise!" but, his weight being very considerable, he thought better of the attempt. He babbled the words to the tablecloth; and, one of his servants having loosened his neckcloth, he slumbered contentedly in that position,

which he preferred to one under the table. The room was small and panelled. It reeked with the smell of candles, of meats, and of warm brandy-and-water. Mr. Bestwell grew more excited, more marshal, more patriotic. He said that the fact that the Duke of Berwick, with his Jacobite forces, had reached that neighbourhood, was proof of the justness of the warnings he had so frequently given, that ever since the treaty of Münster the French had been preparing forces, and the Jacobites gathering together in France. And when Mr. Roland questioned him as to his having any doubts about the identity of the Duke, the little fiery man exclaimed that to doubt this at all was to be guilty of treason, since he, Mr. Bestwell himself, had so frequently prophesied this incursion. Moreover, it was an act of Providence, for the Ministers must now declare war upon France—and it would be a very bloody war. And when Mr. Roland Bettsworth suggested that the Duke of Berwick, whom he had once seen, must be a man very much older: or, in the event of his death, which had been for some months expected, his heir must be a much younger man; Mr. Bestwell, with an air of friendly superiority,—for he was by this time of opinion that he was in the finest company in the world,—Mr. Bestwell insisted that Mr. Roland did not know the Jacobites. They were men of the most devilish ingenuities, so that they could counterfeit their faces and forge their statures. Nay, they could grow humps and make one leg shorter than the other. And this was for the purpose of plotting and spying in His Majesty's dominion. And, unconsciously,

Mr. Bestwell aided Mr. Roland in his designs, for being very convinced that the occasion was one of great peril, and called for watchfulness on the parts of magistrates and the like, he heartily concurred in Mr. Roland's plan that they should make a sober night of it. Thus, after the cloth was drawn, no spirits and but a bottle and a half of claret a man were put upon the board. Mr. Bestwell called for a pipe and tobacco, and continued his orationing. The atmosphere grew more cloudy, Mr. Williamson sang ballads to himself, Mr. Roland waited. He learned that the Justices intended next morning to send messengers to the Privy Council to say that they had taken the Duke of Berwick, and to ask whether they should send him under guard to London or whether they should hang him upon the spot. Mr. Bestwell was of opinion that the Privy Council would desire the former alternative, and in that case he would, himself, conduct the Duke to London, where he expected great honours, the very least of which would be that the King should make him a Minister of State.

It wanted ten minutes of midnight when Major Penruddock threw the door open. He was a little in his cups, having freely tasted of the wine at Ashford Manor-house. His face was flushed, he laughed jovially and struck his high boots with his riding-whip.

"Ho!" he exclaimed, "we have taken a very notable woman prisoner, and the Jacobites are in retreat towards the town of Dover."

Mr. Justice Bestwell started to his feet. "In retreat!" he exclaimed. "By God, I will pursue them!"

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The Major looked at him with a pleasantly sardonic smile. "Pursue them!" he exclaimed. "Egad! a famous notion. You have at most a hundred men, and they should be twoscore thousand."

"Sir," Mr. Bestwell exclaimed,—and by this time, through having observed the rule of sobriety, he was no more than three parts in liquor,—“I would have you know that a hundred of our men of Kent——”

"Sir," the Major replied, "God forbid that you should think me discouraging to you in this most excellent scheme. On the contrary, I am most anxious that you should begone, only I say take with you every man that you can take,—not that I doubt your personal valour, but that you may do the more bloody execution upon those flying traitors."

In his martial enthusiasm the little Justice had already drawn his sword. "Gentlemen!" he exclaimed, "for our credit I would the rather have fewer men or none, so the fewer would share in my glory; but what you say of dispatching as many of these traitors as may be has great weight with me."

"Mr. Bestwell," the Major said, "I advise you to draw off every man from this town. For myself, I wish I could be of your company, but my plain duty is to stay and guard the prisoners we have taken. But I warrant you this, that you leave this town of Ashford in my safe keeping whilst you sally forth. And you may deliver over to me the keys of your jail—nay, it is your duty to deliver over to me the keys of your jail—so that you

may take with you the jail wards, who I have observed to be lusty men and well armed with pikes and lanterns."

Mr. Justice Bestwell, in whom the martial instinct stirred to a preternatural degree, he having avowed all his life that his sole passion was to be up and at them, and to paint the fields with gore, earning blood-Besmirched laurels,—Mr. Justice Bestwell, to his credit, wasted, a minute upon attempting to recover his brother Justice from his stupor, but Mr. Stareleigh lay across the tablecloth in an oblivion that was to him an Elysium more fine than could be found in whole groves of laurel bushes; and Mr. Bestwell, pulling his hat over his eyes and brandishing his sword forward as if inciting troops into the smoke of battle, rushed from the room.

Major Penruddock burst into peals of laughter. He bent double, he raised himself again, and his face was the colour of his scarlet coat.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I cannot but laugh."

"Oh, laugh till you split your guts," Mr. Jack Williamson said, "and there will be the less loss."

"To think," Major Penruddock continued, "of those poor devils pursuing into the pitchy marshlands—and it's a damned cold, inclement temperature, and blacker than a closed wine-closet—to think of them pursuing in those quagmires a foe that hath no existence."

"Then there are no Jacobites," Mr. Roland said.

"Jacobites!" the Major laughed. "Why, there have been none this twenty years! They are gone and forgotten. If it had not been that Mr. Justice

Bestwell had this bee in his bonnet no such thought would ever have come into my head, and then your brother must have been arrested as a mere highwayman instead of as the Duke of Berwick."

"My brother will be infinitely obliged to you," Mr. Roland said.

"Why," the Major laughed, "he has cause to be; and you too, for, since we had to put you all out of the way, I think it has been monstrous delicately done."

"Why, for delicacy," Mr. Roland said, "'tis the prettiest piece of perjury I have ever seen."

The Major bowed to him. "I have never myself designed anything better," he said.

"Then it is to you alone that we are indebted?" Mr. Roland asked.

"Oh, three heads are better than one," he got his answer. "Mr. Chuckel was very desirous that your brother should be put out of the way, and was ready to act the common informer. Mr. Harcourt remembered, what he has a trick of forgetting, that he is of His Majesty's Privy Council, and so of authority over these Justices. And he was ready to aver that Mr. Bettsworth was a sneak thief. But I had chanced to meet these Justices in the Court Hall, where they were dispatching of harlots and sectarians in clean defiance of the law, but to the greater glory of God. And finding that Mr. Justice Bestwell had this whimsey of Jacobites and French, and Dukes created by James Stewart, I was seized with this monstrous ridiculous idea of having him laid by the heels for the Duke

of Berwick, though for the life of me I do not know what make of man this Duke may be, nor how old he is, nor what he looks like. But it is all one; and I have never seen Justice so glad even when they were sentencing poachers to the gallows."

"And you have done all this to gain three hours with Lydia Chuckel," Mr. Roland said; "and Lydia Chuckel is now in your possession?"

"Sir," the Major said, "I have done all this to gain three hours with Lydia Chuckel, and Lydia Chuckel is now in the possession of Mr. Harcourt and myself, being well out upon the London road and surrounded by a strong body of horsemen."

Mr. Roland stood wide-eyed, and at last saluted the Major's smirk of triumph with an extraordinary peal of laughter. Where Major Penruddock had once bent double, Mr. Roland did it six times, and at last, staggering back on a chair, he shook till he was exhausted.

"Why, thank God I am not a miller!" he said.

The Major, whose jocularities had given way to some imitation, asked, "Sir, even why?"

"Because," Mr. Roland answered, "you would see so far through my millstones."

There had come at that moment into the Major's head a consideration that he had not foreseen. It occurred to him that he had taken no precautions to secure Lydia Chuckel in case the Honourable Mr. Harcourt should desire to make an even further rape of her. She was at that moment upon the road, with a rendezvous appointed at the village of Great Chart. And it suddenly occurred to him that Mr. Harcourt might steal a march, and might

progress further, or might deflect into the dark and unsearchable recesses of the Weald that lay very little to the south. It had been his intention to disable Mr. Harcourt and to steal Lydia from him before they could reach London. In that way Mr. Harcourt would have lost his bet to Sir Francis Dashwood, with whom the Major was in alliance, and the Major would procure for himself a desirable mistress, and one calculated, in all the circumstances, to do him credit, and to be for a season the cynosure of all the Town. It was, therefore, under the influence of this unpleasant reflection that the Major spoke with some acerbity.

"Mr. Roland Bettsworth," he said, "I have no leisure to bandy words with you, and the laugh is all on my side, since, by my action, your brother has lost twenty thousand pounds to me and others. And he, and you his assistants, have become the laughing-stocks of the Town, together with these Justices, and some others. And I would recommend you to fetch your brother out from the jail and to addressing himself to hanging of Mr. Chuckel, who would be all the better for it. For this is a task better adapted to the talents of Mr. Bettsworth than the mingling in the society of his equals."

"Sir," Mr. Roland said, "my brother keeps his money in a very strong box, and he laughs best who laughs the last."

"Why, you will be unconscionable braggarts to the last, you Bettsworths!" Major Penruddock said. "You make a man's gall rise into his throat. Nevertheless, it shall not be said that Major Penruddock was wanting in magnanimity to a

fallen foe. I have served enough in the wars for that, and can disregard the puling of the defeated; so I will bid you stop here a moment or so, that I may bring you the keys of the town jail. And you will have observed that I have done my best to rid this house of able-bodied men, so that you may easily release your brother from his incarceration, for to no other end did I suggest that Mr. Bestwell should draw off his forces. And this, I maintain, is the action of a man of magnanimous integrity."

Major Penruddock swung through the door, the skirts of his scarlet coat flouncing out behind him. Mr. Roland and Mr. Williamson remained for a moment in silence, and then suddenly, as if the effort of imagination needed no word, they drew their swords and placed themselves behind the door, Mr. Williamson peeping through the crack to observe the Major's return along the passage. It was their intention upon his re-entering the room with the keys of the jail to slam the door and pin him with their points at his throat. Extended upon the table, Mr. Stareleigh slumbered peacefully, his snore coming in a gentle cadence. From a distance they could hear the shouts of Mr. Justice Bestwell and the hum of voices of his men. The sounds diminished, drew off, and disappeared; and Mr. Williamson's breathing, in his excitement, grew as stertorous, if more suppressed, than those of the slumberer, for Mr. Williamson considered that he had a crow to pluck with the Major, and was eager to be at his throat.

"Will he have failed of getting the keys?" he asked in a hoarse whisper. And then he swore

violently and sprang into the air. The glass of the window crashed violently inwards. It splintered all through the room. Four candles fell upon the tablecloth, and a bottle half full of wine crashed suddenly into nothing, the liquid splattering in one gout upon the sanded floor.

"Gentlemen," the voice of Major Penruddock called through the window, "I have made too many campaigns to be so taken in ambush. I laugh, you perceive, the last."

They heard the clatter of his horse loud upon the cobbles, and diminishing, disappearing. Upon the table lay two immense keys, united by a string that threaded a bullet of lead.

"By God!" Mr. Williamson exclaimed, "who laughs last?"

"Oh, we, we!" Mr. Roland answered him; "since this Lydia Chuckel is by no manner of means the original of 'Celia in her Arbour.'"

Mr. Williamson exclaimed, "The devil!"

PART IV

I

MR. ROLAND BETTESWORTH was swayed by no great feelings of brotherly love. Nevertheless, upon his way to the Round House compassion moved him, and still more the family feeling. It seemed to him disagreeable in the extreme that one of them should have been^{*}laid open to the possibility of being twitted, or at the least tittered at, upon his entry into an assembly. And compassion came into play with a warm emotion of disgust at the thought of his brother's being mishandled by a pack of dirty rustic scum. If, in fact, he desired to humiliate his brother as far as he himself was concerned—if he didn't exactly stomach his brother's princely airs towards himself—it disgusted him that, if only for a space of three or four hours or so, his brother had not been able to act princely towards all the rest of the world.

Mr. Williamson having been rendered valiant and uproarious by the contents of a half bottle of Schiedam that he had ravished from the host's parlour of the inn, now entirely denuded of men-folk by the necessities of bloody war—Mr. Williamson was now vocal and martial in the extreme. The houses

of the broad market-place slumbered, shut down and lifeless as if in extreme terror; and with his immense sword drawn and whiffing in the air, Mr. Williamson pursued an uneven course over the cobbles, surrounded by a ring of the town dogs, who neglected his more tranquil companion. This appeared to Mr. Williamson to be a matter of such grave inhospitality that, with imprecations of the most sanguinary, and with a voice of hoarse, but direful, distinctness, he invited the inhabitants to issue forth and have their throats cut. To Mr. Roland the adventure seemed one calling for secrecy and stealth. Nevertheless, to the accompaniment of outrageous and grotesque noise, they passed the pound, the stocks, and the ducking-pond, and came eventually to the Round House itself. There was a sufficient glimmer from a concealed moon to let them find the dark opening into the round stone building; and by feeling upon the iron-ribbed surface of the door they came upon the keyhole; and finally, to the sound of rusty janglings and bumps of the leaden bullets upon the surface of the door, the feeble light from a lantern issued forth, together with such a stench that Mr. Roland fell backwards against Mr. Williamson, who had just succeeded in catching upon the flank, with the point of his sword, the most vociferous of the dogs. Mr. Bettesworth came out, an unseeing silhouette against the light, and Mr. Williamson cheered. But at sight of the Methodist's black hat, which, crowlike, appeared round the corner of the archway, Mr. Williamson was seized with a new access of martial ardour, so that he transfixed the hat with his blade. He waved

it over his head; he cheered, and his cheering once again aroused the innumerable dogs. Mr. Bettesworth's spirit revived at the contact of the fresh air, and at the sight of the blade held by a man to him indistinguishable amidst the gloom.

"I do not know," he said, "what inhuman scoundrels you may be, but within here is a woman dying or dead."

"Brother," Mr. Roland said, "whether the woman be dying or dead let us hasten from here."

For, though he was not very well sure of his ground, he had already imagined for himself that if the magistrates should return and find the nest cracked they might well be arrested, all over again.

"Brother," Mr. Bettesworth said, "if that is you, there are some things to be seen to that I will not hurry away from."

Mr. Roland desired to send Mr. Williamson with all haste to the Manor-house to arouse Mr. Bettesworth's men, to get out the horses, and to be upon the road. "Brother," he said, "are you wounded? Are you sick? Can you walk? Could you ride?"

"Why, I do not know," Mr. Bettesworth answered. "But I am not minded to be gone."

"Oh, come away!" Mr. Roland said. "Do you not understand what has been done in your absence?"

"I neither know nor care," Mr. Bettesworth said coldly; "but here there have been enacted three of the grossest cases of miscarriage of justice, and I

will burn the nests about these rotten magistrates before I leave this place."

"Brother," Mr. Roland said, "the place to light the slow-match is in London, not here, where they will have you by the heels again. And for the woman, if she be dead she is dead; if she is dying she is past help. And at the best of it, the Major and Mr. Harcourt have taken Lydia Chuckel and are posting along the London road with her."

In the darkness, which was now grown thinner to their accustomed eyes, Mr. Bettsworth could be seen to strike his brow. There arose in him a fierce struggle. He desired to overtake and recapture his prize from those who had ravished her from him. The knowledge did not come to him as so very considerable a disturbance, since during his conversation with Mr. Williams, the Methodist, he had been able to accredit his rivals with the conception and achievement of some such scheme. But he had hardly given them credit for the power to get so speedily into action; so that hitherto he had set foremost his desire to avenge himself, and to perform a public office in righting the wrongs done to the Methodist and to the stick-gatherer, and the inhumanity towards the dead prostitute. Mr. Roland had begun again to speak, intending to console his brother with the news that Lydia Chuckel was not the model for Celia; but when he opened his lips, Mr. Bettsworth exclaimed "Silence!" in a voice so masculine and terrible that Mr. Roland was at once assured of his brother's bodily welfare, and piqued into a condition the reverse of compassionate.

"Why, if the Emperor will be Emperor," he said, "let him sit on his own throne." And seeing that Mr. Bettesworth was determined to count forty, he, none the less determined to be gone from that place, pushed, kicked, and jostled Mr. Williamson to the other side of the stocks, and, by shaking him, reduced him to a condition of some attention.

His directions were that Mr. Williamson should fetch their three horses from the inn, and, tethering two of them at the park gates, he should gallop with all speed to the Manor-house and waken Mr. Bettesworth's servants, bidding them get on foot and to horse with all the speed they could. For Mr. Roland was determined that at all costs, and under whatever pretext, they should be gone from the town before it awoke from sleep to fury. Mr. Williamson was drunk, but he was so used to action in such a state that, save that he might beat an ostler, if any ostlers were to be found at the inn, he might be trusted to carry out the bringing out of three horses and the awakening of a whole army of men; whereas, Mr. Bettesworth had but five servants with him. He returned to the jail mouth in time to hear Mr. Bettesworth deliver a formal oration, in the course of which he himself chafed consumedly.

"I have," Mr. Bettesworth said, "arrived at the following determinations. I have before me the problem of this jail and the problem of Lydia Chuckel."

"Brother," Mr. Roland interrupted, "you have before you the fact that for the moment you are the most ridiculous figure in England, except for the Justices here, who, being of no mortal account,

will escape with the laughter of the common sort alone."

Mr. Bettesworth chose to take no heed of his brother's speech, and this only the more irritated Mr. Roland.

"In this jail," Mr. Bettesworth continued, "there were four persons, of whom three were unjustly condemned, and the fourth barbarously done to death. I myself, since I am of the most account, was the most unfairly handled; for the heavy avenging of that I can wait my leisure. But here is an old woman, having, by the laws of England and the tenure of her hut, the right to pick dry sticks from hedgerows in the parish of Goldwell. She has been cast into jail at the instance of the lord of the Manor of Goldwell for exercising a right that is as indubitably hers as is mine to drive a coach and four up the steps of St. Paul's. For the maintaining of the rights of this old woman, I would, if it were necessary, spend the entire contents of my purse against this lord of the Manor and these Justices, who are in league to grind the faces of the poor."

"Brother," Mr. Roland said, "have you not heard that the water-bailiff of Berwick St. James, of which place you are lord of the Manor, hamstrung the donkey of Simon Tapper because it stood in one of the pools of the Winterbourne, though Simon Tapper had his common rights and water-ingress for his beasts?"

Again Mr. Bettesworth ignored his brother's interruption. A slight and drizzling rain began to fall, and, as the fog rolled inwards over the

marshes to the high ground, the moon was almost obscured.

"But," Mr. Bettesworth said, "the case of this old woman also may stand over till I have leisure. There remains that of Mr. Williams, who is a preacher of the sectarian—or possibly it is not a sectarian—order of Methodists. For until this matter can be brought before the Synod of Canterbury—this association being, as I am assured, but three years old, and its head having left but this month for the Virginias, so that its orthodoxy or non-orthodoxy cannot be settled this three years—until the matter is finally adjudicated upon, it cannot be settled whether this Mr. Williams, who is a student of Oxford and in Holy Orders, being the son of decent parents of this neighbourhood, conforms, or is more justly a Nonconformist. But let us put it that he is a Nonconformist: none the less the Act against sectarians is annually suspended by Parliament. Therefore his committal at the instance of the parson here is an infringement of the liberty of the subject which I am not minded to pass over."

"Brother," Mr. Roland said, "if you are minded to redress all the wrongs of the town of Ashford, we shall be here till it snows."

"The case of Mr. Williams," Mr. Bettesworth continued, "will, I doubt not, prove the longest of any, and therefore I must have the more leisure to consider of it. For there enters into it not only the common law, but the canon law, and the point is a very nice one. For if, upon the one hand, he be proved to be Nonconformist, he has committed no

crime; but if he be proved to be orthodox, then, being in Holy Orders, he has infringed against the Church law by preaching without licence in the parish of a clergyman of the Established Church."

Mr. Roland said, "O God, O God!"

The fog grew thicker. The houses of the market place disappeared altogether. The stocks and the looming form of the pillory were blotted out. They were invisible one to another; only a watery ray from the lantern within the jail silhouetted Mr. Bettesworth's legs and cast their shadow upon the mist. And suddenly the voice of the old woman within made itself heard, whimpering for two pennies to lay upon the eyelids of the corpse.

Mr. Williams said, "Glory to God, who has raised up a strong pillar for us! I have never heard our case put more concisely."

"It appears, therefore, to me," Mr. Bettesworth continued, ignoring alike the old woman and the preacher, "that I may best meet this case by taking Mr. Williams as my chaplain, since for the time being his occupation is gone and his money has been stolen from him by the jailer. And the more so, for my most immediate purpose, since, being by birth of this neighbourhood, he has a private and special knowledge of its quaggy and impenetrable roads."

"Brother," Mr. Roland said, and by this time he was worked into an ironic fury, "you stand here a laughing-stock. You are the most ridiculous and befuddled creature in the country. You talk of what you will do, and for what reason you will do it, for all the world as if you were a popinjay prince. But

I tell you,"—and Mr. Roland's voice grew harsher and harsher;—"if you don't take the road at once you will never hold up your head again. But you will be known as the Duke of Bewick, and be listened to by no Councillor and no Council in the kingdom, and be the paltriest creature that——"

Mr. Bettsworth had been, by means of his formal speeches, at once proving to himself and them that he could contain his passions, and striving to justify his desire to himself, but his voice shook in his throat, his hands clenched and unclenched, his face was covered with cold sweat; and at his brother's words there issued from his throat a harsh sound like the bark of a Barbary ape. All the hatred that he felt for the two men who had fooled him, an immense rage that seemed to tie his entrails into knots, cast him as if from a sling upon the blotted shape of his brother. He caught Roland by the throat, he showered down blows upon his face, his eyes felt as if they were bursting from his head, his chest was inflated beyond bearing; it seemed that in striking Roland he was buffeting the world that would sneer at him. Roland tore himself away with a sudden feint of the shoulders, and when he was a yard or two off he said, with a cool harshness—

"If you approach a step, I will spit you like a dog." And, automatically, his hands began to rearrange in the darkness the ruffles at his neck.

"Hark ye," he said coolly, "you may gallop to hell with the preacher at your back, but you shall have no more use of me—no, not till you beg my pardon upon your knees. You will grow into a rustic oaf, a toss-pot, a beaten dog with its tail

between its legs. Go home and rot, for you will never dare show your face in London Town again."

He disappeared into the fog, and then from a distance his voice called, "You will find your horses at the park gates."

Mr. Bettesworth remained invisible too, in the fog, a mere centre of deep sounds of breathing. The minister stood silent, reflecting upon the evil that there was in the world. The old woman's whimpering came from the lit interior of the jail, and from the stone caves large drops of condensed mist began to fall spattering upon the ground.

Suddenly Mr. Bettesworth said hoarsely, "Come you, be you parson or what you will, show me the way from this place."

II

SIR FRANCIS DASHWOOD was pacing side by side with the Earl of Pembroke upon the green lawn that ran beneath the old windows of Winterbourne Manor-house. It was a June evening, and the men who had been felling the immense cedar that shaded the banqueting hall, having topped and lopped it, had left the great trunk bisecting the garden at right angles to the house and had gone away for the day, since the wood-carts could not come till the morrow morning. Sir Francis had taken up his quarters in the inn at Wilton, but having been waited upon by the lordship of Pembroke, he had been induced to accept the hospitality of Wilton House. Here he had passed his time very agreeably in the company of the several members of the Herbert family that were then in residence. He had paid more than his usual attention to his wardrobe, to his chargers and to their furnishings, and he was agreeably aware that for splendour no man in that county, and for many miles around, outshone him.

And upon Mr. Bettesworth's lawn, which was contained at one end of the house by a high wall of brick and at the other by a wall hardly less massive formed of yew, which enclosed a clipped garden,

the Earl of Pembroke and Sir Francis paced with prodigious stateliness, one hand each in their breast, and their moulded legs, in their white silk stockings, moving with a sort of prancing gait and a mechanical exactitude. Winterbourne Manor being some four and a half miles by way of the Plain from Wilton House, Sir Francis had been in the way of riding daily to visit the Signora Poppæa and Lady Eshetsford. Sometimes he would ride away from his friends when they hawked the bustard upon the Uplands. He would sigh at intervals with an extreme depth of feeling if, Lady Eshetsford having refused herself, he found himself alone with the Signora Poppæa. Lady Eshetsford was his constant toast at the Earl of Pembroke's board: he praised without ceasing her black eyes, her mutinous, cherry lips, her alabaster brow, and her nose, which, though it turned up at the point, he compared to that of Carpaccio's "Venus," which hung beside the dais in the picture-room at Wilton House. He took, in short, every possible measure that could ensure the news of his passion coming to the ears of its fair object. And having, in this way, laid down what he called his earthworks, he was prepared, so he told his noble companion, that afternoon to lay a desperate and formal siege to her ladyship's heart.

"But," the Earl said, and curiosity for the first time overcame his natural politeness; he slightly agitated his amber-wood cane and fluttered the ruffles at his wrist, "I have heard that you have made a great wager to marry another lady, and I am unable to understand why you are not now pursuing that search."

"My lord," Sir Francis said, "if I were so ill-bred as to pursue that search,—for, for sure, no man of spirit and breeding would halloo across the world after the mere model of a painter—if I were so ill-bred as to pursue that search in my own person, instead of leaving the matter, as any gentleman would, to the hands of some trusted agent, nevertheless so fair a quarry as is this beautiful lady would sure affect me. I am more torn by the innumerable arrows that her liquid eyes cast into me than ever was Actæon by Diana's hounds. And sure your lordship will agree and applaud my taste that bids me throw away a few thousands of guineas in the effort to secure for myself a creature of so exquisite a grace and of a charm so consummate."

The Earl bowed his head deferentially.

"We all," he said, "must come to Sir Francis for lessons in the *beau goût*, and my mind is relieved to hear from him an explanation so complete and so satisfactory."

The Earl, nevertheless, believed not one word of this explanation, for it was said by those members of the company that was enjoying the hospitality of Wilton House, that Sir Francis had shirked his plain duty of going to Ashford out of his fear of Mr. Bettesworth's sword. It was known in London, and reported there in the country, that a duel between these two gentlemen was an inevitability, since Mr. Bettesworth was enraged against Sir Francis for having carried off and hidden the portrait of Celia; and since Sir Francis, if he had any spirit at all, must, with an equal intenseness, resent the expressions Mr. Bettesworth was said to have

used concerning him. It was said, moreover, that Sir Francis was paying court to Lady Eshetsford since, once wedded to her, he would become a member of Mr. Bettesworth's own family, and that thus a duel would be avoided at the cost of the wager which he abandoned. And these rumours the Earl of Pembroke accepted as gospel truth, though it gave him none the less pleasure to be the companion of one reputed to be so distinguished a wit and one, so much the leader of the *ton* and fashion. He had, indeed, at the present moment, his marching orders, which were to lead aside the Signora Poppæa and Maria Trefusis, whilst Sir Francis made formal suit for the hand of her ladyship.

"And doubtless," he said, "your motive in paying court to her so early after her husband's death is, that no other bird may have a chop before you at a cherry that will attract so many."

"Your lordship," Sir Francis said, "reads my heart as it were a book."

There advanced to them over the lawn, seemingly in a solid phalanx, the Signora Poppæa, Lady Eshetsford, and Maria Trefusis. The Signora Poppæa limped a little on her right leg; she leaned upon her ebony crook, the point of which went deep into the soft turf. They were all three in black, her ladyship crowned with a tall cap from which a monstrous black veil depended over her shoulders. But Maria's burnished hair was tied with a black ribbon that permitted her ringlets to descend in the nape of her neck. She and her aunt advanced with a mincing gait which was the

complement of the gentlemen's formal strut. At each step their heads bobbed slightly forward, and the Signora would have imitated them but she hobbled so. The Earl strutted deliberately to meet them, bent forward so that the curls of his dress-wig fell about his face. He addressed the Signora and Maria Trefusis, including them in one whirl of his cane, whose handle he held near his long nose.

"In the cut garden," he said, "there is upon a catalpa tree a singular growth or excrescence as to which I would gladly have your opinion ; and yours, madam. Her ladyship it will interest less, since all her passion is of the Town."

"Very prettily dismissed, your lordship," Lady Eshetsford said ; "I shall yet, under your excellent tuition, see Maria upon the straw among a parcel of cows."

The Signora took the Earl's arm, upon which she leaned with more weight than the habits of elegant society would have prescribed. "But," she said, "if your lordship will abduct me you must needs afford me support." And the three moved off towards the little arch cut in the wall of yew, Maria indicating with her fan the tops of the trees and clouds in the sky, so as to assume with her body such poses as she had been taught were correct for an engaging young lady of her station in life.

Lady Eshetsford and Sir Francis walked formally, and side by side, in front of the long gallery. Sir Francis was fuming because the Earl had so indelicately separated the party. "Madam," he said, "these hawbucks are ever homely."

"Very few have the advantages of Sir Francis,"

Lady Eshetsford answered ; " but I find his lordship well favoured enough."

Sir Francis clapped his hat over his heart and groaned, " Unhappy me ! " But her ladyship was not in any way minded to afford him an easy opening.

" Have you lost your wager, that you groan ? " she asked.

With his hat still over his heart, Sir Francis stepped before her and faced her. He extended one of his hands to her, and fell gracefully to his knee.

" Madam," he said, " who cares about a wager when a charmer so adorable is nigh ? "

Lady Eshetsford extended her black fan over her lips and laughed down at him.

" Such a hot flame," he continued, " consumes me that unless you quench it with the dews of your compassion——"

" Why, I will weep over you if you will," her ladyship mocked him. " But be composed ; this is only summer lightning, where there is a great appearance of flame and no heat. You will not die of it, poor man."

" Madam," he said, " summer lightning is of the summer, which is a pleasant season. You shall make my life all one summer."

" Why, so I will, by leaving it alone," Lady Eshetsford said ; " for with my late husband I lived always in such a storm as was as cold as winter and as bitter as the sea."

" Madam," Sir Francis said, " such is my passion——"

"Why, your passion is such as it is," Lady Eshetsford said. "But such as it is it is of a very rapid growth. I think it subsists only since your great wager was made."

Sir Francis, playing his cool game, winced his long eyelashes, and with a circumspect smile he regarded the grass. He imagined that he had already sufficiently prepared his ground, and that some of his many groans and sighs, uttered in public places since he had come down to that neighbourhood, must have reached her ladyship's ears. He imagined her, therefore, to be prepared to hear of his passion. But he had very little idea of what make of a woman her ladyship was. He was therefore undecided whether to continue talking of his love, or whether to urge upon her the fitness and convenience of the union, the parity of their births and stations. He remembered, however, that Lady Eshetsford had the reputation of a nimble wit, and he was rising from his seat with the intention of pursuing a campaign less ardent, when Lady Eshetsford said—

"It astonishes me that though we have met in assemblies and routs this four year and more you have never importuned me with attentions, nor so much as pursued me with challenging glances. Yet, no sooner is this wager made——"

"Madam," Sir Francis said, "the just laws of Society, the fact that your husband lived——"

"Sir Francis," Lady Eshetsford mocked him, "I have yet to hear that the fact that their husbands lived protected Mrs. Good, or Mrs. Marshal, or Lady Type from pursuit by you."

"Madam," Sir Francis started forward to exclaim, "not one of them was such a miracle of chastity, of virtue, of rectitude, as is Lady Eshetsford."

"Sir Francis," she laughed at him, "I marvel that what you so much admire in women you should so seek to undo. And if you adore me so much for my virtue, I would have you none the less in admiration that I am no fool, as these other women were. In short, what have you to offer me?"

"Madam, my hand," Sir Francis said.

"It is to your credit that you do not say your heart as well; and," she answered gaily, "that is all the credit I can see for you in this matter."

Sir Francis displayed very little perturbation.

"Madam," he exclaimed, "surely the report of the passion that I have entertained for a long while for you must have reached your ears?"

"Surely," she said, "the servants at Wilton House have reported that for the last nine days I have been your toast. But the springe is set too openly in the sight of this woodcock. What have you to offer me?"

"Madam," he said, "my hand, my lands, my name, the protection of my right arm."

"Sir Francis," she laughed, "I have a name as good; I have lands as good; and, since the making of the wager, I have had the offer of an arm that I think will protect me far better. And he who made this offer, in making it was willing to lose his wager, to abandon his search, and to be written down a fool."

For the first time Sir Francis frowned.

"Lady Eshetsford," he said, "have not I, too, abandoned this search? Is not, therefore, my devotion as great?"

Lady Eshetsford held her black fan over her lips and began to titter. She laughed to measure, meaningly, and under control; so that he felt as if she were turning to ridicule his bearing and his clothes. He pivoted swiftly upon his heels and walked the extent of the lawn to where the felled cedar obstructed its length. He abandoned his formal pace, hardly turning out his toes at all, but walked with his head bent down, his curls falling across his face. The trunk of the fallen cedar tree was so bulky that when he came up to it it was of the height of his chin, and he stayed with his face to it, pushing with his cane at the pieces of bark that had fallen off upon the turf and spoiled the formality of the ordered lawn. Having so reflected for the space of a whole minute, he turned, business-like, and strode back to her ladyship.

"Madam," he said, "if you consider that the purchase of this portrait was an action discreditable——"

"Why, no, sure!" she interrupted him; "Fortune and alertness were upon your side."

"And folly and misfortune upon the side of my rival, whosoever he be."

"Why, Sir Francis," Lady Eshetsford said, "have you not heard that Fortune is a woman, and that, in consequence, women fall to men whom Fortune does not favour? That is the secret of what is called womanly compassion."

"It is the secret of womanly unwisdom," he answered; "for is it not better to take the hand of a man whom Fortune favours, than of one——"

"Sir," she said, "a gentleman cannot forward his suit by belittling his rival. So is a woman made, so contrary is she, that she will take the counterpart to you, allege you what you may."

"If this man Bettesworth——" Sir Francis began, with disfavour in his tone.

"Sir Francis," she laughed at him again, "Mr. Bettesworth has the virtue of priority to set against yours of alertness; you were the first with the picture—he with me. Which of you brought his eggs to the better market?"

"I swear," Sir Francis said, "that when I purchased the picture I had no idea of who the original was; and it was a chance word from Mr. Bettesworth that put me upon the scent. Set that, once more, you see how this fool throws away his whole fortune."

"Why, no," she answered; "surely if Mr. Bettesworth put you on the scent, the more credit to Mr. Bettesworth. And I would have you observe that you have missed a very fine opening for a compliment, since you might have said that you purchased the picture on account of your passion."

Sir Francis raised his shrinking eyes steadily to hers.

"Thus your ladyship knows?"

"Why, my ladyship must have known him the first!" she laughed at him. "It is in the nature of things that one should know of one's own actions. But what is more important is that I know that

your Worship knew, and so, puff! vanishes your passion into smoke."

"Why, madam," Sir Francis said, "I trust it is no offence?"

She made him a curtsey.

"Sure, 'tis no offence," she said, "to beg of me to put money into your purse, and to crown your brows with laurel of a successful achievement. And every woman is for sale to the highest bidder."

"And do I not," he asked, "bid as high as Mr. Bettesworth? Am I not worth so nearly what he is that the difference should hardly weigh down an apothecary's scale?"

"You fall short," she answered "by a hound or two here, by an acre or two there."

"But shall I not travel a thousand miles or so further in the estimation of the world, and in place and profit?"

"Sir," she answered, "when I said that every woman was for sale to the highest bidder, I did not state what coin the auctioneer set upon his lots."

For the second time Sir Francis fell upon his knee.

"Madam," he said, "I have put in my bid, and there is no other bidder. Let me give you earnest of my purchase," and he caught her hand and pressed it to his lips.

There was a soft sound of hoofs upon the turf beyond the cedar tree. Lady Eshetsford saw the head and nostrils of a yellowish horse, and the figure and hat of a rider who held his whip on high. The horse rose, the figure was obscured; the beast clumsily topped the brown trunk, with all

its feet together. It stood for a moment with its nostrils distended downwards, as if it were upon the top of a high bank and felt a panic fear. Then slowly and wearily it subsided to the grass, its forelegs crumpling together so that its near shoulder seemed to come first to the ground. Its rider part fell, part crawled, and part wrenched himself free, and with a slightly staggering gait, but still grasping his whip, ran towards them. The horse seemed to luxuriate for a moment in its recumbent position. Then wrenching its legs and its neck clumsily in the air, it got on its feet and trotted dispiritedly towards the gap in the yew hedge. Its movements were of a fatigue so utter that it seemed hardly to desire to escape. The head of Mr. Williams, the Methodist, gaunt, dishevelled and hatless, peered over the tree-trunk. From his own horse he had prudently descended. Mr. Bettesworth, because he desired to remove from his dress and countenance some at least of the traces of travel and privation that he had gone through, had entered the garden by a postern gate in the walls, in preference to the state entry in front of the Manor, which came by way of a bridge over the little river. He had been almost more cast down than it was possible for a man to be, and he was seeking his home with the instinct of a sick creature. Nevertheless, aware that Lady Eshetsford was beneath his roof, he desired to appear before her at least well washed and in a clean suit. But the sight of Sir Francis Dashwood, kneeling, and in possession of Lady Eshetsford's hand, had roused him to a flicker of delirious fury; and, not caring in the least that he

was riding no better than Mr. Jack Williamson's old horse, and that it was very tired with more than ten days of incessant travel hither and thither, he had set the poor beast at the tree-trunk. Its fall had shaken and bewildered him. So that it was not the desire to count forty so much as a sheer lack of words that made him remain for some moments in a ghastly silence. His eyes rolled from the face of Sir Francis Dashwood to that of Lady Eshetsford. The flesh of his face had fallen away, so that his nose was very hooked ; and his skin was gone very brown with weather and exposure.

A pallor came over the face of Sir Francis. He rose to his feet and attempted to ask how Mr. Bettesworth's health was, and how he had fared in his adventure. But the attempt met with no success, and his voice faltered and fell before he had completed his first sentence.

And even Lady Eshetsford was seized with a measure of consternation, so haggard was Mr. Bettesworth's mien, and above all his eyes. She could not accuse herself of any wrong in receiving and rejecting the addresses of Sir Francis, but she could have wished that this man in the hour of his misfortune had not found them together, since it must needs, if only for a short time, seem to add to his misfortunes. Thus they all three remained in deep silence.

And suddenly Mr. Roland Bettesworth came sauntering round the house-end. Having had nothing better to do, Mr. Roland, upon parting from his brother, had ridden straight to Winterbourne, since it appeared to him that the business he had

most in hand was that of courting Maria Trefusis. For the hatred that, for the time, he felt against his brother had only accentuated his desire to extract money from Mr. Bettesworth's pockets, and he remembered Mr. Bettesworth's promise to provide him with a wedding portion if he secured the hand of Lady Eshetsford's ward. Thus he had taken but four days to reach Winterbourne, and in that house the story of Mr. Bettesworth's misfortunes was at least a week old. For Mr. Roland conceived, with some justice, that the way to wean Maria from her affection for his brother was to hold that formerly princely person up to the ridicule that he had certainly incurred. In her own mind, knowing that Mr. Roland was, when it suited him, a very capable liar, Maria Trefusis reserved, at any rate for the time, her belief in his story. But Lady Eshetsford and the Signora gave it a very good credence. And, upon the whole, they were glad of it. For both these ladies were agreed that Mr. Bettesworth, although he was almost the perfection of a man, yet ran a great danger. Lady Eshetsford considered that godlike as he was—and his name was never off the two ladies' lips—he was uninclined to make great effort, or any effort at all, except upon occasions of heroical prominence. Lady Eshetsford admired immensely the sword-play he had shown against her late husband. Still more did she admire the ready wit with which he had thought out the stipulations that he had imposed, for her protection, upon Sir John. Indeed, for these things she loved him and would be very content to marry him in the end.

. But his wager at the Dilettante Society, which seemed to her a masculine foolishness beyond the folly of most men, a mere piece of contentious boastfulness, a declaration for the sake of notoriety that he would perform a feat for which he was in no way specially adapted,—this she regarded as the product of a tendency to vaingloriousness that might well cause him great troubles in after life.

The Signora, on the other hand, remembering the eccentricities of his uncle, dreaded that Mr. Bettesworth might become in turn such another, if he should grow accustomed to regard the world as a place which contained no checks for his overbearing will. He was, she was afraid, certain in the end to come up against such an obstacle as that thwarted desire to drive his coach up the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral that had sent Mr. Bettesworth, the uncle, back for good into the country. Here M. Bettesworth, senior, had been an obdurate tyrant to small people entirely under his control. He had been soured, cruel, harsh, and, owing responsibility to no one, he had given to his lightest whims the weight of the decrees of Jove. This fate she feared for Mr. Bettesworth himself.

Thus both of them welcomed Mr. Roland's narrative. They saw in these circumstances a hope that Mr. Bettesworth might be so chastened by these misfortunes that he should become something resembling an ordinary man. And although both of them, being women, were determined that he should not lose the twenty thousand pounds that he was so ready to throw, as it were, into the gutter; and although both,

because they loved him, were determined that he should incur no real ridicule, and that the laugh in the end should be on his side, both rejoiced that the attainment should be at the cost of some suffering.

III

YET at the sight of his attenuated features and shrunken eyelids, Lady Eshetsford felt more of pity than of elation; but she took it for a sign of distraction that his first words were neither for herself nor for Sir Francis, but for his brother, who, half turning to retreat, hung nevertheless upon his heel. Without either greeting or salute, Mr. Bettesworth asked abstractedly—

“Where are my men?”

“Be damned to you if I know!” Mr. Roland said. “Kicking their heels at Ashford, or hung upon the gallows. All’s one to me. I have left your service.”

“And my horse?” Mr. Bettesworth said. “Who had my horse?”

“Why, Jack Williamson had your horse,” Mr. Roland answered. “He rode away upon it from the inn. I have a letter from him to say that he is in Maidstone, lying in in great state at an inn under charge of a widow, who he says will marry him.”

Mr. Bettesworth commented, but rather as if he were speaking to himself.

“If I had had my horse I might have overtaken them. I came upon their tracks twice; once that

night at Charing, and once the day after next at Blackheath, but they rode too fast. I could not overtake them. Nor yet have I hanged Chuckel; his accounts were in order by the time I got back."

He spoke with such a weariness, as of despair; that Lady Eshetsford was moved to say—

"You have ridden with neither men nor clothes, nor yet a good horse?"

"But," he continued, ignoring her interruption, "I have yet a thing upon me."

Attracted by the horse, which had run into the garden and was browsing upon the yew hedge, the Earl of Pembroke and Maria Trefusis came out upon the lawn. Maria tittered at sight of Mr. Bettesworth, but upon a glance from his eyes became suddenly stricken with panic. The Earl's eyebrows were arched with curiosity, and then Mr. Bettesworth spoke with a sudden ferocity to Sir Francis.

"If nothing else is to come of this wager," he said, "yet remains for me a word with you; and since there are gentlemen present, let us step apart."

"Be damned if I will make one!" Mr. Roland said. "You may do your throat-cutting alone until you have made me an apology."

Sir Francis became disordered in his face.

"Sir," he said, "Mr. Bettesworth, my lord, this is surely not the time nor the place, nor is there any occasion given that I am aware of——"

The Earl regarded Sir Francis with his features made up to express a desire to be of assistance.

"Why, Sir Francis," he said, "this lawn, as you

will observe, is very neatly cut in two by that felled tree-trunk, so that there is a space set apart for gallant conversation. Moreover, I perceive beyond the tree the head of another gentleman, so that there are witnesses enough. And, without doubt, the ladies will go into the house, and warn no servants to interrupt us. I have never seen a time nor occasion more proper."

"Why," Mr. Bettsworth said harshly, "if he will not step apart, we will commence it here and now."

Lady Eshetsford was of an exceeding pallor, but because she could not trust herself she did not speak; nor, indeed, since the occasion was one at once inevitable and proper, had she any desire to. She touched Maria upon the arm, and the two were gone round the house-end. The four men, considering themselves alone, were about to recommence their affair, when, perceiving the Signora Poppæa hobbling very slowly from the cut garden, the three who were actively engaged walked swiftly round the butt of the tree-trunk, for there was between it and the house-wall a space of some three feet. Mr Roland went quickly towards the Signora, and having hurriedly informed her what was afoot, he returned towards the others. He clambered, however, with some nimbleness on to the trunk of the tree, and having picked up a small piece of bark he began to chew it for the sake of its acrid flavour, and to whistle between his teeth. This was to show that he was a spectator, and not a participant. Finally, he slipped into a sitting posture, and sat kicking his heels very contentedly against the

bark. The Methodist, Mr. Williams, was protesting that, as a minister of God, he could not be a second in a temporal duel. It was his province, he said, to act as assistant in spiritual duels, in which weak souls fought with the strong fiend.

"Why, you will make a legal witness if anything come of it," the Earl said.

Mr. Bettesworth was stripping off his tarnished coat; the right breast of his waistcoat was very much torn, having been injured in the affray at Ashford. His coat, however, the Methodist had, to the best of his ability, patched up with needle and thread at the various inns at which they had halted, so that it was not so very bad, Mr. Williams being the son of the chief tailor of Ashford.

Sir Francis was still complaining that he did not know upon what occasion they were to fight.

"Sir," the Earl said, "is an excuse ever needed for a fight? Let us take it that this gentleman is offended because your clothes are in better trim than his. In short, as I am the Earl of Pembroke, I am well satisfied that all things are fitting and proper."

Mr. Bettesworth had thrown his coat over the arm of the attendant Methodist. And having divested himself of his own upper garments, Sir Francis threw them over Mr. Williams' other arm. Mr. Bettesworth had nothing to say, and Sir Francis, being inwardly conscious of a tone of displeasure in the Earl's voice, and conscious that all the reports of his demeanour upon this occasion would come from his lordship, extended his blade in silence. Mr. Bettesworth laid his own along it, and the Earl,

holding the two together with the grave manner of a connoisseur, declared that there was but half an inch of difference between the two, and that the advantage lay, with Sir Francis. Therefore Mr. Bettesworth, if he liked, might cry the encounter off till two blades of equal measure could be fetched.

Mr. Bettesworth muttered hoarsely that a kitchen knife would satisfy him. Nay, he would not delay the encounter if he held nothing more than one blade of a pair of scissors. His voice shook in his throat, and his eyes had grown suddenly bloodshot. It was decreed by the Earl that they should fight after the Hamborough manner. And in their waistcoats and shirt-sleeves of lawn, each with his sword out, the two stood back to back. They each took twenty paces, Mr. Bettesworth walking furiously and kicking out of his way the pieces of bark with which the lawn was covered. Sir Francis, however, paced circumspectly, and with the air of a man deep in reflection. Mr. Williams regarded them with rapt attention. Mr. Roland, perched on the trunk, still kicked his heels and whistled. The Earl rested his hand upon his sword-hilt and waited at attention. It was the rule in this kind of encounter that when the combatants were come each to the end of his allotted paces, they should stand with their swords drawn, each having his back to the other. Upon command to let go, they should turn upon their heels and approach as swiftly or as slowly as it pleased them.

They stood waiting a full minute by the Earl's

watch, for his lordship said that it was meet they should take their leisure to commend their souls to God. He put up his watch, but took a pinch of snuff, drew his sword, wherewith to strike up their blades if he deemed proper, and reflecting, with pleasure, that this might make a very pretty and prolonged mêlée, he cried out sharply—

“Fortune favour the bravest! Let go!”

Sir Francis came round very smartly, Mr. Bettsworth more clumsily, for he was stiff with riding, having come thirty-two miles that day upon a poor horse. Sir Francis stepped with a high and mincing gait, but Mr. Bettsworth suddenly ran. His steps were uneven, his mouth open, and a great rage had him by the throat, so that he had no saliva in his mouth. And faced by this fantastic and haggard vision, Sir Francis, who was most used to the concealments and the graces, hung back for a moment; though the rules prescribed that once being started neither combatant must halt or deviate by a hair's-breadth from his course towards the other. It ran swiftly through his mind that this was monstrous and unfair, since if he kept his head he might have held his own for five minutes with the swordsman that Mr. Bettsworth was reputed to be; whereas, if he lost his nerve—and this indecent exhibition of ferocity was sufficient to make any gentleman lose his nerve—he was as good as dead meat. He cursed hurriedly under his breath. His opponent's eyes, set fixedly upon him, seemed to grow as large as teacups; the opposing sword waved in circles. A sweat came over his face.

Suddenly Mr. Bettsworth's hand seemed to

plunge forward towards the earth, the sword curved through the air, his shoulder struck the earth, and, supine, with the impetus of his motion he pitched a full yard farther along the turf. With an extraordinary hurry of rage he scrambled on to his hands and knees; he attempted to rise, but with a loud exclamation of pain he sank down again. Having trodden sideways upon one of the pieces of bark, Mr. Bettesworth, in falling, had sprained his ankle.

"God help me!" he moaned, "I shall do no more fighting to-day. It is fate that I should appear a fool!"

Mr. Williams was bending over him with a deep solicitude; the Earl choked with visible chagrin.

"I am very much to blame," he said; "it was my duty, as second, to have found a fitting place, and this was no fitting place for the encounter."

Mr. Bettesworth's face had become very pale. His eyes were closed with pain.

"I think," Sir Francis came near to exclaim, "this day falls to me? There is no one to meet me. My heart goes out to Mr. Bettesworth with pity, but so it is."

Mr. Bettesworth hissed through his closed teeth. "Prop me up against the tree," he said harshly. "Give me my sword again, and see which of us goes hence!"

The Earl exclaimed, "Mr. Bettesworth! Mr. Bettesworth! I could not stand by and see this."

And suddenly Mr. Roland Bettesworth slipped down from the tree-trunk. The Signora Poppæa

was hobbling slowly around the butt; and at the upper window that looked down upon them, the sash suddenly grated up. Maria Trefusis was leaning out and laughing.

Mr. Roland walked leisurely to his brother's back, where he sat upon the turf. "Let be," he said to the Methodist. He put his hands under his brother's armpits and dragged him along the grass. He propped Mr. Bettsworth's back against the trunk, and pushed the hat straight upon his head.

"Let be," he said, "you ill-fated fool! They shall not all of them have the laugh of us."

He stalked slowly over to where Mr. Bettsworth's sword lay upon the turf. When he had it in his hand, he moved the blade gently up and down in the air, balancing it with a look of disfavour.

"I am astonished," he said to the Earl, "that my brother can do so well with a thing so heavy in the hilt. Nevertheless it must serve my turn, since my blade is six inches longer."

"I protest," Sir Francis said suddenly. "Is this another quarrel to be fixed on me?"

"Why, Sir Francis," the Earl said, "hitherto there has been no quarrel, since your blades have not even touched, and it is the touching of blades that is the very essence of an encounter."

"Besides," Sir Francis continued, "I have no quarrel with Mr. Roland Bettsworth."

"Sir Francis," Mr. Roland said, "you have of late very much frequented this house of my family. And you have about you, perhaps upon your handkerchief, or upon your stockings, or I know not where, of perfume of orange peel or of ambergris, or

perhaps it is no perfume at all. But with perfume, or the lack of perfume, you have very much offended my nostrils. And this, sure, is quarrel enough for any gallant man. If you need more quarrel, I will say things more particular, but this should be enough."

"By my soul, a very handsome speech!" the Earl of Pembroke said.

Sir Francis drew his sword again, to show that he was ready to continue the combat, but he grumbled: "I protest this is very like an outlandish shambles. I have never seen so many people of so odd a description upon a field of honour."

Mr. Bettesworth was propped against the tree-trunk; the Signora Poppæa, having hobbled so far, had gone down upon her knees beside his sprained ankle; the Wesleyan minister was still burdened with Mr. Roland Bettesworth's outer garments, so that he appeared to stagger beneath his load; Maria Trefusis was leaning out of the window, with her elbows on the sill and her hands upon her chin; the Earl was looking up at her and laughing, so that he showed finely his large white teeth.

"This is a hole and corner to have one's life sought in," said Sir Francis. "You Wiltshiremen are of a band together, like all of the West Country."

The Earl suddenly spun round upon his heel.

"Sir Francis," he said, "it will give me pleasure to meet you in the Assembly Rooms at High Wycombe, or in any other town of the East Country you please, with the town-crier sent

round and none but East Country men present, if you doubt my impartiality."

"My lord," Sir Francis said, "I will talk of your impartiality when I am through with this affair."

"Oh, *paucas palabras!*" Mr. Roland exclaimed, "can we not dig holes in each other's ribs without first letting off all the wind in our bodies?"

"Well, gentlemen, get to your places," the Earl exclaimed.

They stood back to back, and again started out. The Signora had begun to peel the stocking from Mr. Bettesworth's leg.

"I protest," he exclaimed violently, "this is none of my brother's quarrel, but mine," and he kicked his legs in the attempt to rise. Nevertheless his head fell back and he groaned. Mr. Williams was disembarassing himself of the gentlemen's coats, laying them in order upon the tree-trunk, so that he might have his hands free to tear up the handkerchief that the Signora held out to him.

"Into what a savage race have I fallen," he exclaimed, "and what a man of blood is my benefactor!"

The Signora looked up at him with her humorous eyes.

"Friend," she said, "have you passed your early years, like Achilles, in an Academy of the fair sex?"

"Why, I am a minister of God," he answered; "the time has come for repentance and for instant conversion. Have faith."

"Misericordia!" the Signora exclaimed, "I come

from the Holy City, and the proverb has it, 'Go to Rome and lose your faith.'"

Having torn the handkerchief in half, Mr. Williams, with something of an attempt to clap his heels together, and with something of an attempt to bow, handed her the strips of white linen.

"Madam," he said, "since you have come from Rome, where faith is lost, it may be a sign that you seek it. I am here that can provide it."

The Signora looked at him with an amused and gentle incredulity.

"Reverend sir," she said, "you are attempting a sally, which I had not awaited of you. But I lived five years in the close society of His Holiness Innocent the Fourteenth—may his blessed soul pray for me!—and if after that you can inculcate into me one scintilla of faith, you will achieve a miracle more astounding than that of St. Diadomene, who converted dung beetles."

Behind their backs the Earl of Pembroke exclaimed loudly: "Let go! And may God have mercy on your souls!"

The minister spun round upon his heel, the Signora negligently turned her head.

The combatants were walking slowly towards each other with both gravity and decorum, and having reached a point at about the middle of their course, with an excess of courtesy each saluted the other, waving their rapiers in a wide curve, and setting the hilts just to their chins. Sir Francis' sword was first down—and, at point, Mr. Roland's followed it. They touched blades, they elevated their left hands.

Almost invisibly, with a sudden pressure, the knight's sword was borne down. Mr. Roland's had the air of being shot upwards by a spring. His point entered the knight's shoulder, just upon the shoulder blade, and with so much force that Sir Francis fell backwards on to one knee. His sword dropped to the ground, and he supported himself with one hand, an expression of extreme pain contorting his mouth. Mr. Roland looked curiously at the point of his sword.

"I am sorry, my lord," he said, "that I gave you no longer an entertainment, but there has been here too much talk."

The shrill and joyous voice of Maria exclaimed from the window above—

"Why didn't 'ee pink un through the heart, Roland?"

And Mr. Roland, sure of his ascendancy, waved his hand negligently up at her, whilst the Earl exclaimed, "Oh, fie! oh, fie! naughty madam!"

Mr. Roland dropped the sword at his brother's feet.

"If yours was not the arm, yours was the blade," he said. "They shall never laugh at us Bettesworths for swordsmen, whatever they do for fools."

He took the half handkerchiefs from the Signora's hands.

"This popinjay has more need of corking than my brother," he said, and going over to Sir Francis, he prepared himself to push strips of torn linen into the wound, that was beginning broadly to discolour the knight's grey brocaded waistcoat.

"A bloody day!" the Methodist exclaimed. "A woeful and bloody day!"

"Friend," the Signora answered him, "I have seen seven gentlemen contend together for permission to pick up my handkerchief, and of them all but three left the room alive!"

IV

IT was, indeed, from Mr. Williams that they learned all that they were destined to learn of what had happened to Mr. Bettesworth during his progress from Ashford to Winterbourne. Mr. Jack Williamson having been not too drunk to get the horses out of the stable, had been, nevertheless, by far too gone in liquor to distinguish between his own and the horse of his employer, so that he had ridden off into the country with no very clear idea of any destination at all, and had vanished into the night. The Methodist had led Mr. Bettesworth very faithfully through the fog to the park gates, where they found tethered the horse of Mr. Roland himself and the rather sorry yellow nag which had been allotted to Mr. Jack Williamson.

"My benefactor," the Methodist said, "acted during all this time as if he had had a disordered intellect. Yea, it was as if God had sent into his brain a cloud of smoke, or a bewilderment of vapour." Mr. Bettesworth, it appeared, had forgotten his men and had forgotten his resources. He had consulted the Methodist as to what road it was likely the abductors of Lydia Chuckel would have taken to get to Town. He had to take into account that on the one hand they would desire to travel

with all the expedition they might use; on the other, they could not take a very direct route, since they would know that Mr. Bettesworth would be very soon released from jail--nay, they themselves had encouraged his release. The London road went through Charing, and for most of its length, even as far as Maidstone it would be fairly good going. This road they would scarcely take, since they might be very certain to be speedily pursued by Mr. Bettesworth and his men. The only other road that they would be certain of travelling—for ways through the Weald were mere quagmires—was one that made through the village of Great Chart.

Mr. Williams was unable to account for Mr. Bettesworth's actions—"How could we, being but two, avail against so many?" Nevertheless they set out as hard as they could lather through the misty uplands and valleys. Perhaps Mr. Bettesworth was unwilling to lose time waiting for his men? Perhaps he laid so much to the account of his single arm that he could rid himself of all the abductors? Or perhaps it was a mere madness, without any definite object as without any calculation. So they rode, through the thick mist that was up to their horses' ears, beneath a moonlight full of black shadows; a half-mad man upon a spiritless horse, followed faithfully by a half-crazed priest, who was as full of misgivings as of gratitude. To the Methodist Mr. Bettesworth, with his wealth, his rank, and, above all, his assurance, appeared to be a gentleman in the extreme, valuable to a flock already oppressed. Mr. Bettesworth had promised

to distend his purse-strings till at least their cause was sifted and adjudged orthodox or heretical by Convocation; and this was more than, either by praying or field-preachings, they had so far achieved.

At Charing they heard from the pike-keeper that three hours before eight riders, going very fast, had passed through to the westward. They reached Biddenden at dawn, and heard as much again. An hour later Mr. Bettsworth's horse cast a shoe, and when they stopped at a forge they heard just the same tale—that eight riders had passed three hours before, going, however, to the northwards towards Orpington. One of these riders, indeed, had, like them, been delayed by a cast shoe, which the smith declared had been very curiously lost, inasmuch as the nails had had all the appearance of having been wrenched out by force, and the other shoes being very newly put on. This appeared to afford the smith so much reason for conjecture that he dwelt upon it, and every permutation of the chances that can befall horseshoes,—such as inefficient nailing by a previous farrier, nails in themselves lacking or flawed, the sudden striking of a stone; or even as happened, so it is said, to Sir Greville Bevell in foreign parts, whose horse trode upon a lodestone and had all its shoes and nails wrenched off at once.

Having eaten nothing at all by night or day, they came, just three-quarters of an hour later, outside the Good Intent Inn, upon six horses tethered by the head to a rack manger. Four men in Major Penruddock's livery, which was of Cornish yellow

with black worsted epaulettes, were upon the instant howling to them to stop; and drawn out from the door by the great noise, his face very hang-dog and his eyes lacking lustre, came the Honourable Simon Harcourt of His Majesty's Privy Council.

Mr. Bettesworth, so the Methodist said, descended from his beast as if he were falling into the road. He strode up to Mr. Harcourt with his whip raised, uttering blasphemies that Mr. Williams declared to have passed any comfortable imagination of mankind. Mr. Harcourt, on the other hand, was in a condition of rage quite as lamentable, while his voice was the more shrill, so that through a scene which appeared to be mostly tumult and babel, the Methodist could hear him repeating again and again: "Before God, you may find her, for I have her not."

And, Mr. Bettesworth being held back by one of the retainers in Major Penruddock's livery, Mr. Harcourt, with an expression of vacuous imbecility remained, his hands deep in his breeches pockets, and his hat upon the back of his head, upon the red brick steps of the inn, gazing at his muddled boots.

Mr. Harcourt's horse, it appeared, had cast a shoe, as Mr. Bettesworth and Mr. Williams had already heard. Now Mr. Harcourt's charger, Turenne, which Mr. Harcourt had won at lansquenet, in the year 1733, from the Maréchal de Créquy in Paris, was the apple of Mr. Harcourt's eye, so that with the shoe cast he would not, as any other man would have done, ride forward upon a servant's horse, leaving the servant to follow upon Turenne. But he

must stop at the forge himself to see that Turenne's hoofs were not over-pared, or his nose injured by too tight a twist, so that, leaving the main body of them to progress, he had remained behind at the forge.

Riding onwards, he had come upon the six servants, four of Major Penruddock's and two of his own, halted at the inn. They gave him word that Major Penruddock and Lydia Chuckel, having been closeted in an upper room, over pots of breakfast ~~ale~~ and a dish of bacon—this being the first meal they had enjoyed since leaving Ashford—Major Penruddock and Lydia Chuckel had ridden forward, bidding the men await Mr. Harcourt there at the inn; and the dire point was that they had never passed the next turnpike, which was three-quarters of a mile down the road. They must thus, it seemed, have gone away across the trackless country. There was no finding them! There was not so much as finding any trace of them. Mr. Harcourt knew that Lydia Chuckel was open to bribery, for had not he and the Major, on the night before, succeeded by offering a very high bribe, in which both he and the Major were to share, in making her leave the protection of Mr. Bettesworth.

"So that we are to imagine," Mr. Williams said, "that by a new treachery of Major Penruddock's—namely, that he himself would pay the whole of the bribe, and doubtless more in addition—this damsel had been induced to go away with the Major alone."

They were both by this time—and this they

knew, for a fact, Mr. Harcourt having later written it to Mr. Bettesworth at Ashford Manor-house—sheltering at Norfolk House. And thus the Duke claimed, through the aid of Major Penruddock, to have won his part of the wager—which was that he should house the original of “Celia in her Arbour.” Major Penruddock claimed to have won his portion of the wager from Mr. Harcourt in that he had found Celia. Mr. Harcourt had lost to the Duke in that he had failed very signally in the attempt to bring her to Town; and Sir Francis Dashwood having lost to the Duke, had for the moment lost also to Mr. Bettesworth since he had wagered that he would marry Celia. Sir Francis, indeed, might still win his wager by coming to terms with the Duke and Major Penruddock, since he might purchase Lydia Chuckel from these two gentlemen. Still, this was considered unlikely, since it was known that the Major had converted Lydia into his kept mistress with a sealed settlement, the use of a glass coach so long as she remained faithful, and four footmen of her own.

And after that Mr. Williams reported that he and his benefactor had undertaken incredible voyages. They had gone across country, in one direction and another, until they had reached the outskirts of London itself. But at the point when they had reached the post which marks the limit of the coal and wine dues of the City of London—upon Keston Common, where they had lit off their horses to drink a pot of ale in a low pot-house—Mr. Bettesworth abandoned all

hope of recovering Lydia. This resolution, Mr. Williams reported, had seemed to shake him as much as sudden conversions of faith had shaken sinners in jails that he had seen.

"But, alas!" Mr. Williams said, "abandoning the idea of carnal triumph, did he seek spiritual peace? Oh no, oh no! He turned his mind solely upon revenge, and from that hour onwards spoke but little and seemed to be dead to this world." The only sign, in fact, that Mr. Bettsworth had shown that he knew there were other beings besides himself in the world, was that from that hour they had ridden more slowly, since there was no longer such need for haste, and their poor beasts were tired and trembling. Mr. Bettsworth was determined to have the life of Mr. Chuckel, and then those of Sir Francis Dashwood and of Major Penruddock. Since Mr. Harcourt had been as much fooled as himself, he was content to spare his life.

Their horses had had thirty hours' rest at Ashford Manor-house, where Mr. Bettsworth had returned to see to the arrest and the hanging of the land-steward.

At Ashford Manor-house they found, of coherent persons, only Mrs. Chuckel, whom Mr. Williams reported to be a personable woman, showing signs of being ready to listen to his ministrations, had he only had the time to devote to her. Mr. Chuckel, however, had disappeared with a gentle urbanity, informing his wife that he never intended to see her again; that he hoped to hear that Lydia was hanged for picking of pockets, or whipped at the cart's tail; and that he intended to live on his

honourable savings in the West of England until the day of his death. And Mrs. Chuckel was able to inform Mr. Bettesworth that she was convinced—her husband having with success run his three ship-loads of smuggled goods—Mrs. Chuckel was convinced that Mr. Bettesworth would find her husband's accounts in order. The money of his takings to the last penny was to be found in a corner cupboard in their bedroom, the keys of this were in Mrs. Chuckel's keeping; and his tallies and papers were in the upper drawer of her bureau. So that Mr. Bettesworth had, at any rate upon all the scrutiny that he then had leisure to give to the accounts, no pretence whatever for the arrest of the fugitive. A civil action might lie against him for deserting his post without notice, but, effectively, Mr. Chuckel had escaped scot-free. And at the thought of Mr. Chuckel's urbane defiance, of his jaunty step and his self-satisfied face, such a fever of rage overcame Mr. Bettesworth that he had perforce to spend a night in bed. But upon the receipt of a letter next morning from Mr. Harcourt, giving him the news not only that Lydia Chuckel was with Major Penruddock under the protection of the Duke of Norfolk, but that Sir Francis Dashwood was reported to be paying his court to Lady Eshetsford, Mr. Bettesworth had been seized with so hot a desire to effect the downfall of Sir Francis that he forgot alike Mr. Chuckel, the exposure of the Ashford magistrates, and the avenging of the wrongs of the stick-gatherer and the dead prostitute. They had set out incontinently for Wiltshire, having no luggage, and

only a very little money ; but Mr. Bettesworth had borrowed from the estate funds. Mr. Bettesworth's servants having waited at the Manor-house for three days, had set out at their own discretion upon the road to London.

V

"**M**ADAM," the Signora said, "no, very assuredly, I do not think that this medicine has been too strong for Mr. Betteworth."

Lady Eshetsford drew her skirts more high in front of the wood-fire, for though it was by then June, the Winterbourne, still full, ran round the house, and in the evening the mists rose.

"Why," she said, "you have known him for years longer than I. But it seems to me that Sir Francis will not lie more than three days abed now, and so far I have had not three hours of converse with Mr. Betteworth."

"I have not known my benefactor for more than three weeks," Mr. Williams said, "so that I do not know how he was before these troubles, but if ever I have seen a madman, Mr. Betteworth is one."

The Signora's boudoir, a tall, dark, panelled room, was filled with odd objects of her former career. Over the chimney-piece was a huge steel engraving of St. Peter's, with three gentlemen in enormous skirted coats pointing with tasselled canes at various portions of the cupola. Flanking this, and glaring at each other, were portraits of the late Mr. Betteworth and of the late Pope Innocent XIII. The

white marble statuette of a stricken deer should have occupied a shelf to itself beside the door, but it was overlaid with books of devotion, and with account books of the Signora's estate and charities. The complete dress of purple paduasoy, that she was in the habit of wearing of a morning, was suspended across a corner of the room, enormous and inflated with a string that passed through the sleeves and was attached to two nails. One of the halberds, still decorated with the long mourning ~~wreaths~~ ^{veils} that had been carried by the servants at the late Mr. Bettesworth's funeral, loomed dimly in another corner of the room.

"This state of mind," Mr. Williams continued, "is one that I have frequently seen in those about to suffer conversion—this moodiness, this paying no attention either to his victuals or to the general conversation. I have seen men like this for several days—nay, for weeks on end—and then suddenly they will spring into the air and cry Glory! Glory!"

The Signora regarded him with a humorous and kindly glance.

"No doubt," she said, "Mr. Bettesworth and Lady Eshetsford and myself will find conversion upon the same day, and we shall spring into the air and cry 'Glory! Glory!' which in my case will be a greater miracle than such as I have seen worked by Cardinal Capelone sixteen years ago come Michaelmas."

"Why, we have worked greater miracles of conversion than this," Mr. Williams said.

"I don't doubt it," the Signora answered; "but

for the moment the point to be considered is which of us three shall beard Mr. Bettesworth? You, sir, might do it by virtue of your sacred office. Yet it is a matter of doubt whether even here, of a certainty, your office is at all sacred, which I say with no intention of discourtesy, but only as one anxious to discover what may best serve my former pupil."

"Madam," Mr. Williams said, "for the moment I will willingly waive any claims that I may have to this ministration. For there is about Mr. Bettesworth at the present time an icy humour that I cannot very willingly cope with. He has read more in books of law and of theology; he has indited more petitions and scrutineered more accounts in these last few days than I had conceived had been within the powers of endurance of any mortal man, not upheld by a sacred passion. And this gives me the greater hopes of his conversion, for may not this be the working of a fiend within him? On the other hand, his preoccupation is mostly of a purely carnal kind. He is seeking revenge, aggrandizement, and the assertion of the temporal law. But this, again, in certain parts of it gives me more hope. For certainly his activities make for the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor, the humble, the oppressed; such as the stick-picker of Ashford and the dead harlot."

"For myself," Lady Eshetsford said, "I set little store by stick-pickers and harlots, and the poor and humble. These must fare after their kind. But I think it is a symptom of a beneficent disorder that Mr. Bettesworth applies himself thus diligently to

a hard task, and one that he himself alone can undertake."

The Signora grasped to herself her black ebony crutch, and pulling herself by the arms of the chair out of its deep recesses, she groaned with pain but stood upon her feet.

"I," she said, "even I myself will go and speak with him, and I do not think that either of you will take this as presumption in me. For upon the one hand, in the presence of Lady Eshetsford he may feel himself moved by shame, mortification, and failure. In the presence of you, Mr. Williams, he might feel anger and disgust. This would not be so much because of your personal properties as because Lady Eshetsford, being on the *ton*, must remind him of the wager he imagines himself to have lost, and Mr. Williams of his ridiculous plight in the Round House. Whereas I, though I am only an old woman, having remained here in the home of his youth, where I taught him much of all that he knows, may give him emotions of softness, and may bring to his eyes the drops of human contrition."

Gazing at the fire, Lady Eshetsford was not above grasping at her bosom with a sudden motion of jealousy.

"I beg," she said coldly, "that you will not——"

The Signora Poppæa was shuffling her uneasy bulk towards the door.

"Oh, rest easy," she said, though she could not turn her head; "that which is yours, whether of revelation or of possession, shall be retained for you; my province is only to soften and render ductile the wax that is his soul."

Mr. Bettesworth, too, was gazing at the fire in his great library. It was a tall apartment, as large as the nave of Winterbourne Church, and for the greater part its books were in obscurity, for he had only two candles upon a Chinese lacquered table at his elbow before the fire. His books were divided into such sections as those of Law, Topography, the Chase, and the History of the Ancients, by tall wooden pillars, upon each of which stood a black marble bust of Cæsar, of a Greek, or of a Roman lawgiver, upon plinths of polished granite.

Upon an easel close to the fire was a cabinet picture by Pompeo Cibboni; it had a gilt frame, that shone in the light of the candles, and represented the "Rape of Ganymede."

Mr. Bettesworth was in his fullest of dress—a purple velvet long-coat with silver lace, and tight knee-breeches of white satin that shone like opals in the firelight. His wig of chestnut curls was longer than any he had ever worn before. He had regained none of his flesh; his nose was still sunken and very hooked, though his skin had lost the greater part of its tan, and had the transparency of a bigaroon cherry. His eye gazed at the flames with the blind abstraction of a spaniel's; he remained perfectly motionless, and suddenly his right hand slipped from his knee and fell open at the side of the chair, with a gesture of weariness, of despair, and of abandonment.

From the soft, tall gloom behind his back there came the shuffle of slowly dragging feet, the tap of a crutch, and a deep wheezing and laborious breath. He knew very well that the Signora Poppea

was coming to him, but he did not turn his head. She leaned at last heavily, her elbow upon his shoulder. She looked down upon him, blinking with her always humorous eyes. She had the air of one of those immensely fat priests who, their hands clasped across their stomachs, sun themselves on benches beside their presbyteries, and regard with a tolerant amusement the passions, the strivings, and the play of the children in their parishes.

"My little nephew," she said at last, using an allocution that she had employed many years before, "what have you been doing with your Worship's time?"

He did not look at her face, he remained silent upon the rustle of the flames, and suddenly he exclaimed, with a violent intonation, "I shall never again go to London Town; I will live here all my life, as my uncle did before me."

The Signora wrinkled up the skin around her nose. "Before saying that too," she said, "you should have counted forty; you would have fared very much better if you had always paid heed to that admonition of mine."

Mr. Bettsworth swore savagely, alike at the follies that his precipitancy had urged him into, and because, having unguardedly moved his sprained ankle, he had experienced a very severe twinge of pain. "Let me be explicit," he exclaimed; "it is not because I fear to face laughter or ridicule that I will no more go to London. It is because, having been once made to appear ridiculous, my voice will not have its proper weight in assemblies and places where the Quality congregate."

"My friend," the Signora said amiably, "you are

half lying, and you know that you are half lying, for you care very little for London that your voice should have weight in assemblies on account of your gravity or your knowledge; and you would rather have won this wager than have written one of the treatises of Demosthenes, so that you fear ridicule and the laughter of impertinent girls more than if you had lost half your estate."

Mr. Bettesworth continued to look at the fire and to reflect.

"Why, I believe," he said, "that I would rather have paid away half my estate than that this should have happened. I have an enormous superfluity yet that shall now avail me little in the society of my equals."

"Yet," the Signora said, "the way to encounter these circumstances is to meet them to the face. You had far better go to London, and by the sobriety of your bearing, and the dignity of your carriage, the gravity of your pursuits, and your eager championing of the cause of virtue and the arts, so bear yourself as to become a considerable figure, than thus to retire like a fool or Achilles to your tent, having of yourself only the recollection of failure and rout."

Mr. Bettesworth smote himself upon the thigh. "No, by God! neither will it be so," he exclaimed; "for I will make about the ears of some people such a buzz as they will think thirty hornets' nests have been thrown into their bedroom windows." He rose to his feet with a swiftness of motion remarkable in him, and walked with a gingerly rapid step, cherishing his injured ankle, into the

shadows and hid in an end of the room. He returned bearing a black portfolio bulging with papers. The Signora had settled herself down into his chair, and he stood before her once more, making his back very erect in front of the fire which his broad purple coat-tails almost entirely obscured.

"When this memorial shall reach the King's Privy Council," he said, "some persons shall rue the day when they first heard my name."

The Signora smiled with her enigmatic aloofness. "Your eyes are very feverish and your voice is like a rasp," she said. "I think you are not very certain that His Majesty's Council will not treat your memorials as the ramblings of a negligible idiot."

Mr. Bettesworth swallowed in his throat with rage, but she held out her fat and trembling white hand in a gesture that had always controlled him. "Why calm yourself," she said. "I do not say that you are a negligible idiot. But it is as well to consider what may be the worst that may befall you."

"If they shall not hear me," Mr. Bettesworth said, "and if they will not do as I desire, then I will spend every penny I possess to bring down this Ministry, for they will be treating me worse than ever my uncle Bettesworth was treated."

"Little nephew," the Signora exclaimed, "your uncle Bettesworth was not ill-treated; he was a foolish old man who would have upset all the channels of public life had he succeeded in his first ^{ave} ^{pt}, and if you will not question your conscience rather than your passions you will be just such another, and all the world may be very

glad that you chain yourself up here like a sulky bear."

"But shall I not," Mr. Bettesworth exclaimed hotly, "take my revenge upon those who have injured me?"

He held the portfolio open before his breast. "Here," he said, and he fumbled out a sealed packet, "is instructions to my lawyer to swear an information against Major Penruddock and Mr. Harcourt for perjury and conspiracy. They shall not easily escape under a fine of ten thousand pounds."

He turned over more papers, and extended towards her a thin white packet of great dimensions.

"Here is a memorial to the Privy Council against the Justices of Ashford."

"And what will you do against the Justices of Ashford?" she said. "Since they acted upon sworn informations and complaints, I think that not even the King's Privy Council, with all the bribes you can bestow upon their secretaries, their footmen, and whores, could behave so unjustly as to inconvenience these Justices in your instance."

"Why," Mr. Bettesworth said, "I have considered that; but what can be the administration of justice in that County when upon the instance of such men as those two, and a land-steward, they should arrest such a man as me for the Duke of Berwick? Is it not well known that the Duke of Berwick is of the age of seventy and a dotard; and could any but a maniac imagine that forty thousand French troops could land and progress to within

a mile of the town of Ashford without creating such a din as should arouse half the County of Kent? Yet it is to such fools that the administration of justice is nowadays confided."

"For the administration of justice I care very little, or nothing at all," the Signora answered; "but that you, having been befooled, should advertise yourself to the whole world as a fool of the most immense dimensions, that would appear to me to be to throw the cracked pot after the spilt rice. These Justices would seem to me to be such simple rustics that it would be best to leave them to their folly, rather than to go clamouring about them to the King and his Court; and for these two gentlemen, since they are your equals, not by amercements and fines, but by your sword you should be revenged upon them."

Mr. Bettesworth turned over his papers again, and came upon three other letters.

"Here," he said, "are cartels that I have written to those two and to the Duke of Norfolk, bidding them to meet me half-way between this town and London, or in any better place thirty miles outside the City that they shall elect to find convenient. You perceive that I have left no stone unturned towards the complete avenging of these insults."

The Signora slowly shrugged her immense shoulders until they came up beyond her ears. "For myself," she said, "I leave to you the question of avenging this ridicule; of the Courts of male honour I know nothing, they seem to me to be confused, perplexed, and turbid. But it appears to me that if you should kill all these three

gentlemen you shall be none the less of a fool, since they have tricked you."

"Signora," Mr. Bettsworth said, "of these matters you can know nothing or very little."

She held her head upon one side, as if she were balancing it; her black eyebrows arched very high, as if in a sort of judicial superciliousness. "I have said," she uttered in tones of remarkable and fluting precision, "that of such matters I know nothing or very little, but if I were you I would set to work in a very different manner."

"In the name of God what?" he exclaimed petulantly.

"Why," she said, "if they have covered you with ridicule, cast upon them ridicule still more huge. If they deem themselves to have tricked you, prove to them that they have overreached themselves. Make them to be borne away upon such a tide of ludicrousity that your mischances shall be washed out and forgotten, in such a way as the blood from three Christian throats, if you cut them, could never achieve."

In turn he shrugged his shoulders rather wearily. "This might be very well," he said, "but it is idle preaching to a beggar to buy golden trappings for a horse that he does not possess. How should I cast ridicule upon all these men, who hold complete in their hands all the picture cards of the pack?"

She worked her lips as if she were chewing a succulent morsel.

"Did you never," she observed, and she lowered her voice to gain a dramatic effect, "consider that

after all it was not yet proven that this natural niece of my lady's was the model for Celia?"

Mr. Bettesworth turned his back upon her with a petulant motion.

"This is childishness," he said. "Why else should they have been so eager to take possession of her?"

"But why," she said subtly, "should you be so modest? and God knows that it is not like you to imagine that these gentlemen have had granted to them by the Almighty an especial perspicacity in the discovery of concealed damsels."

Mr. Bettesworth pivoted round as quickly as he could upon his injured foot.

"My own eyes——" he exclaimed.

There came from the shadow by the farther portal a sound of surprised tittering. The invisible door closed upon them, and over the tiled floor there came the hard footsteps of an elated man.

Mr. Roland appeared in the light of the candles. He wore very enormous riding-boots, which, as the fashion of the year was, were turned over at the top with red-morocco.

"Mr. Bettesworth," he said in a tone of truculent sternness, "you owe me ten thousand pounds, for Maria Trefusis has consented to make me the happiest of men."

A spasm of jealous anger contracted Mr. Bettesworth's eyebrows. He stood in silence for a minute; and, since Mr. Roland was not minded to wait until his brother should have counted forty, he continued: "This I do not ask as a favour but as a debt. You promised me, at

Ashford Manor-house, that upon my marriage with Maria you would set against the ten thousand of her dowry ten thousand for mine. Until you struck me I served you with a great fidelity, using my sword in your interest, and releasing you from the jail. So that I make no bones nor false pride in making this just demand of you, nor do I abate one jot of my anger against you."

Mr. Bettesworth had very perceptibly ceased counting, and yet there came no word from him. Mr. Roland approached still nearer into the ring of light, his face working with anger and concern.

"Sure you will not refuse me this," he muttered; but by then he was come within reach of the Signora's chair, and, raising her hand, she delayed him with a slight pressure upon his chest.

"Why, go away!" she said. "We were debating much more important matters."

"But, by God!" Mr. Roland shouted, "I will have this money. For I am tired of being a slave and tending horses, and being treated to blows."

His mouth worked itself upwards and to one side with a grin of malice. "Maria was affected by your princely airs," he exclaimed, "to give me the slip. She thought she had never seen so fine a gentleman till she saw you upon the turf. Since then she has done nothing but laugh at you. You could have heard her laughing outside the door."

The Signora attempted to hush him with little hisses as if he had been a child. But, suddenly, his face very rigid and calm, Mr. Bettesworth spoke—

"If you will send for Lawyer Chase from Wilton," he said, "the settlements shall be made out this

night. I think you have served me with all the devotion that brother can await from brother—and with a little more—for the sake of your name and yourself.”

Mr. Roland stood very rigid, tapping his whip upon his great boot. He looked at his brother with a certain rigidity in his blue eyes; he moved his left foot as if to turn and go.

“Brother,” Mr. Bettesworth said painfully, “my ankle is very stiff, so that I think I should kneel with difficulty. Yet I remember that at Ashford you said you would never be friends with me again till I had offered you an apology kneeling. But if you will take the obeisance as offered figuratively and in the spirit, I ask your pardon now.”

Mr. Roland clasped his crop to his side. “Why, brother,” he said, “when I think of the matter again I will figure you to myself as kneeling to me, and that shall afford me all the more gratification.”

He considered for a moment, and then began again—

“I will not say that I am under any obligation to you, for what you have done was no more than my due. But this I will say, that you seem to be under the dominion of a set of women who keep you as it were upon a hot griddle. They are fooling you, I warn you, for their own ends, and this Lydia Chuckel——”

“Brother,” Mr. Bettesworth said in a soft voice, “I will take it as a kindness if you will go with no more words; and if you will not, I will command you to do so.”

Mr. Roland pressed his hat down over his eyes.

"Why," he said, "I was minded to do you the best turn that has been done you since our uncle did you the favour of dying, but if you will not have it so—and this is the second time that I have attempted to do you this service—why, there is no more to it than 'Your servant!'"

He lifted his hat ironically and swung away out of the room, clinking his spurs together with the gait that that year was fashionable. He stopped at the door to say to the Signora, raising his voice because of the distance—

"I made inquiries just now at Wilton, and Sir Francis Dashwood is out of his bed to-day. This signifies that since, by the conditions of the wager, the days of his illness were days of suspension, there are still four days more in which to win it."

Mr. Bettesworth carefully watched his closing of the door until the crack of light from outside had vanished, and then suddenly, with his whole face distorted, he burst into a fit of ungovernable rage.

And when he grew coherent, "It was but three weeks ago," he said, with a bitter scorn, "that that wench doted upon my shoe-buckles"

"Why, it rejoices my ears to hear you swear oaths," the Signora said placidly. "For it makes you the less to resemble a marble monument. But must you have every woman in the world to be in love with you?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and said "Pish!" many times.

"Friend," the Signora said, "such as Maria's is the nature of the frivolous brain of the world. To some you seem cast down, and they will laugh at you."

To others you are not cast down at all; but the world will appraise you at your seeming value."

"Not cast down!" he exclaimed, with a hideous bitterness. "Is there one thing that I have attempted that I have not failed in? I find Celia; she is raped away from me. I am be-devilled by magistrates, and you say I must not even have revenge on them. I detect in fraud and theft a land-steward, and he saves himself from under my very grasp. I go to fight a duel with a man whose life is in my hands as that of a kitten—and I must trip and fall as if I had not the use of my feet. What then remains for me but to immure myself amongst my people here, who must tremble at my smallest frown? Aye," and he contorted his visage into a hideous grimace and crushed his nails into his palm, "if one of my hinds or tenants here so much as smiles behind my back, he shall be ruined utterly and for ever. For here I am the King, and it will be easy."

The Signora pulled out her black snuff-box and reflectively took a pinch of the brown dust, which she held between finger and thumb, shaking the superfluity back into the receptacle.

"Little nephew," she said, "there is the whole of you. You will always be a king amongst men as if you had the powers of a god, but only where it is easy. You will have the lives of men who are in your hands impotent as kittens. You will have vengeance on poor, tricked magistrates by the expenditure of a small amount of your immense superfluity. Why, when you go to seek a model for Celia you will take up the first ringleted girl who can trick you

with a gown and a sash. And you are for ever thinking of your great dignity as if you had a divine right, as if God Almighty and the blessed Virgin, and all the little Saints whirled round your head in a cloud of glory. But I tell you, little nephew, as I have told you often before, that this is great folly. You are a man whom Fortune has favoured beyond most others, and without effort of yours; but if you will be of any avail on this earth, or amass credit from any save panders and parasites, and girls with empty heads, you must achieve this credit at the cost of some effort of your own. Why, there have been a thousand princes in Italy of ten times as great wealth as yourself; they lived negligible, they squandered their fortunes, and their very names are obliterated save upon old monuments. And if it were only this I would say yet that it might be very well, since it is the common lot of mortality to be forgotten; but remember your uncle, who in his youth, I have heard, was a personable, jovial, and kindly man, yet consider how, before he died, his death was prayed for by all the countryside. The poor are a small matter, and not very much to be considered, but it is better to have their prayers than their curses; just as it is better to live a sober life than that of a frantic maniac. And when I look upon what you have already achieved, I perceive nothing at all save only that you have promised to redress injuries wrought upon a mad priest, a picker-up of sticks, and a woman of the town,—and even these promises you have not yet redeemed. Since you have come to your estate you have done nothing but order a few suits of clothes and make a mad

wager, whereas it is I that have kept down your proud land-steward, that have rendered your charities to your sundry little churches, and have seen to it that the river here did not overflow when the great rains were. So that you are nothing and have achieved nothing, and are tearing out your heart about a grief that need have no existence.* For, having set your hand to a wager, it is necessary for the honour of your house and name that you should continue it to the best of your abilities; nevertheless, here you skulk in your tent, though, as you have heard your brother say, four days of time remain to you in which you might win it."

Mr. Bettesworth shook his head with a patient sadness.

"Why," he said, "let that folly be at an end if you will. What should I achieve in four days, who have done nothing in the best part of a month? But I will do even as you will; that is to say, I will live as goodly as I can here where I am, and control my stewards, and give charity to the churches, and see to it that the rivers do not overflow their bounds when the cattle are in the water pastures."

He spoke with an undertone of contempt, as if these were no duties for the man of spirit that he had been. "With your aid," he continued, "I shall do all these very well."

The Signora shook her head, of which the double chin and the great pendent cheeks rubbed flaccidly upon her collar-bone.

"Why, I am a very old woman," she said, "very fat, very lame, very much touched in the wind; I shall not remain to guide you very long. I think I

could guide you better than another, for I have so long studied your temper and observed your moods. But if I cannot give you the best, I will attempt to provide for you that which in my estimation comes next; but to have it you must go again to London, and that to-morrow."

Mr. Bettesworth said, with a touch of weary resignation, "I have said that I will not go again to London, and go I will not. I am in this more determined than is the mariner's needle toward the Pole."

The Signora smiled at his waistcoat buttons.

"A very little piece of iron," she said, "will deflect that needle from its allegiance;" and, fumbling in her stomacher, which she could not look down upon, she succeeded in extracting a small billet folded to resemble a necktie. She untwisted it tranquilly, her fat hands lying upon her lap.

"My friend," she said, "it is very well that you should give attention to the matters of your estate. Nevertheless it is the custom of the country, which should be observed, and it scoureth off rust from the brain, which should be avoided, that great lords should pass a portion of their times in the metropolitan city of their country, and that they should take to themselves helpmeets and raise children that shall not be brutish."

She had by now untwisted the note until it was a flat sheet of paper. She held it out to him.

"If you are not any longer minded to curse alike the Tritons of the seas and the little minnows of the river pools—if, in short, the advice of an old woman always more ready to laugh than to weep may weigh with you," she said,—"I would have you read this."

Mr. Bettesworth cast his eyes along the lines, suddenly clutched his brows, and with deliberation, but with his eyes staring, snuffed the two candles. He had read the words—

“Lydia Chuckel is not the true ‘Celia,’ which am only I. And, for my part, I am ready to dine with Mr. Bettesworth at the dinner of the Dilettante Society, which shall be given next Sunday, in four days.”

The letter was signed “Celia.”

Mr. Bettesworth’s mouth had become exceedingly dry, so that his tongue seemed to rasp and hiss when he uttered the words, “What significance has this?”

The Signora had clasped her crutch, and was making motions with her elbows and knees to hoist herself from her deep chair. Leaning over her lap, she wheezed jovially—

“Why, without doubt Celia has been smitten by your fine eyes. She has selected you from among the others to reward with her laurels.”

When she was half out of her chair, and bent nearly double, she paused to grunt. “But this I know, that this is the true Celia, and this I advise you, to follow her advice.”

She was by now up to her feet, and leaning on her crutch, panted a little with the exertion.

“But what shall I think?—what shall I say?—how act?” Mr. Bettesworth exclaimed, holding out his hands to detain her. She waddled, however, laboriously away, and when he followed her she pressed him back with the end of her fan.

“Why,” she said, “I have fostered you enough. I have been the best friend that ever you had. But

I will not advise you as to how you should act in any given instance, and I never have. In that your inclinations and your heart must be your guide. Stay here in the shadows and reflect." She shuffled from the room with an engrossed determination, waving her hands before her as if they had been the flappers of a young duck, to constrain him to silence. Mr. Bettesworth began to pace up and down in the vast and shadowy apartment, halting a little over his sprained ankle. Cæsars regarded him with immobile features, the tiers of books disappeared into the obscurity. Once he approached the candles and, bending down, read the letter over again. Expressions of suspicion, of dejection, of elation, of timidity, and of pride crossed and recrossed his face. He grasped the letter firmly in his hand and squared his shoulders, and the light from the candles gave to his curls a little border as of filaments of fire.

VI

HIS eyes when he looked round upon Lady Eshetsford had in them again something of the human. She advanced very slowly, with a face of almost supernatural gravity. Her arms were closed over her closed fan ; her body above the hips swayed in the approved fashion ; and at each step her black widow's cap, that towered over her head like the central one of the Prince of Wales' feathers, nodded formally.

"Madam——" Mr. Bettesworth stuttered, and then he became silent, in order to regain control over himself. She regarded him with a grave scrutiny—there was hardly a fold round the corners of her lips.

"Sir," she said, "I understand that you have for the second time been perusing the intricacies of my steward's accounts, and that you now have the man ripe for hanging."

Mr. Bettesworth made a little gesture with his right hand ; he erected himself to the fullest height that he could assume.

"Madam," he said, and he extended towards her the letter that she made no motion to take, "I have to announce to you that I hold in my hands the model for the picture of 'Celia in her ~~Ar~~bour,'

and I have in consequence, for the second time, to make you the offer of my hand, and, still more, of my heart."

Her arms remaining crossed, with the proper motion of her hand she slowly opened her fan so that it covered her lips, and from its shelter, as if from over the glacis of a fortress, she still regarded his handsome and glowing costume and scrutinized his face.

"Cousin," she said, "you are aware that in marrying me you will be losing your wager?"

He drew himself up still more in his most princely fashion; he pushed out his padded chest so that he had the appearance of a pouter pigeon, and upon his coat, as if with a radiant iridescence, the silver brocade shone and scintillated with each movement.

"Madam," he said, "it has been my purpose from the first to win this wager so that it lay within my hand, and then to cast it away as it were a tribute to your charm and to the affection that I have for you; by making the marriage with you and so forfeiting the rewards of the wager."

She appeared, still holding the fan before her lips, to settle down into the very earth, and there came from behind her fan a little soft and sibilant sound. Mr. Bettsworth would have considered that it was a titter, but since his curls in his obeisance were upon a level with the paste buckles of his white satin breeches he was unable to scrutinize her features.

"A compliment so considerable," said Lady Eshetsford, "merits a reward the greatest that I have in my power. Nevertheless," she continued,

"it will be fresh in your memory, or perhaps it will not, that along with my hand, for what it is worth, I made a certain condition—namely, that you should have seen this Celia, whom I consider to be in every part my equal, and that you should have preferred me to her."

Mr. Bettsworth's silvered and shining sleeve came up towards his heart in a gesture as nearly as possible of real passion and irritation.

"Polly," he said, "I am assured that this Celia is smitten with a passion for me, therefore I can believe that she would be ready to accept my hand. Moreover, I have here a letter from her that assures me that she is ready to partake of a dinner of the Dilettante Society. Now, since I may not very well take her to this dinner without having found her, I may take it that she is willing to discover herself. And since she is willing to go thither with me, I may take it that when she is there I may be said to have fetched her. Thus it is in my power to find, fetch, wed, and in consequence to house her. So that I may in truth say that I have won this wager, but that to attain you I have thrown it away."

"Friend," she said, "I am not set to deny it; and indeed, since I have more secret knowledge of this cause than you, I can the more exactly confirm you in the details of it. You have won this Celia, and I hear it from her own lips. Nevertheless the winning of me depended on one condition that I have made——"

He made a little inarticulate expression of impatience, lifting up his hands towards her.

"Why," she said, "I am not of such a mulish

obstinacy as I would have you tied down for ever by my whims; and if you would assure me—and I take it as a very great honouring of me, and one that fills me with pride and pleasure—if you would assure me that I am the one woman that can confer happiness upon you, why, I very willingly take your assurance, and trust only that your knowledge of your own heart is such that you may be in the right of it. Nevertheless, measure for measure is good merchandise, and if you will not have me upon that condition I would have you have me upon another.”

Minute by minute pride, assurance, and self-satisfaction were reawakening in Mr. Bettsworth. He had been very sufficiently shaken, so that there remained in the recesses of his brain sufficient traces of a species of numbness. These resulted in a sort of timidity before Lady Eshetsford; thus it was rather in a tone of pleading and prodigality that he brought out the words—

“Upon any condition that you will, whether of settlements, of place, or of manner of livelihood——”

“Why,” she said, “later we will talk of settlements and these things, and I warn you that in them I shall show myself of considerable strictness. For it is not that I doubt of your prodigality towards myself, which I am sure would be very enormous, but that I misdoubt your generosity to the rest of the world. I would not have you desist from such attempts as that you should aid this Mr. Williams to prove whether he is orthodox or heterodox, or even that you should aid a picker-up of sticks to prove her right so to do. Nor, indeed,

would I have you abstain from asserting by law your own prerogative to drive a coach and pair up the steps of the Metropolitan Church of London. This lasts appears to me to be laudable and fitting in a gentleman: the two former are a sort of madness such as, to all appearances, men must needs burn their fingers with. And men being men, I have very little against it that they should meddle with things that do not concern them. So that against the spending of a reasonable proportion of your substance in such matters I have very little to say, though you would do better, perhaps, to spend it on the making of an Italian garden here, such as they have at Wilton House. But I have heard it reported that you have said that upon the effort to establish the cause of Mr. Williams and some stick-picking drab you will expend even the whole of your estate. And from my knowledge of you, I can perceive that upon some such objects—even though upon those it should not so fall out—you might very well expend enough if not to beggar at least to cripple yourself and me. So I warn you that since this would not aid us to dwell together in such amity as I hope we shall attain to, I warn you that when the time for settlements shall come my lawyers shall be as exacting as if they were the ministers of the States-General negotiating with the King of France!"

Mr. Bettesworth swept all these considerations aside with one wave of his hand, meaning that on the one part he was ready to throw all that he possessed into Lady Eshetsford's lap, and that on the other he was confident that he could very

excellently minister to and care for their common interests.

"We shall live," Lady Eshetsford continued, "for one-third of the year in Bettsworth House in London, letting my house which I hire from Sir John's heirs revert again to them; and for the other two-thirds of the year we will be for the one half here, and for the other half at Ashford Manor-house, this more or less according as where we shall find it the pleasanter to live. But these are not the conditions, neither, that I desire to extract from you."

"Polly," Mr. Bettsworth interrupted, "do not trouble me any more with your conditions, but take them where you will and how, and tell me no more of it. For the truth is that I have passed through such dark periods that I thought I should not again have the courage to hold up my head to look you in the face or to talk to you of love."

"Why," Lady Eshetsford said, "you have been very tardy in paying your addresses to me."

"Oh!" he exclaimed, and there was a touch of badgered torment in his face, "do not believe that it was more than that I felt too humbled and an object of too much ridicule to come into your presence as a suitor."

"Well, I will take that to be the reason," she answered.

"Laughter appeared to sound in my ears. I was mocked of all men, it appeared to me. I considered only of how I might revenge myself; I considered only that you too must mock with the rest."

"Well, I laughed a little," she said.

"And," he continued, "if I have now in a short span of time recovered myself sufficiently to have the assurance to pour out my passion to you, I would have you consider that I am still in no condition to meditate upon any other actions or to think upon any other things. So that I know that I have gained you, I will leave to you the making of such conditions as you will, and be assured that I will ratify them; and if you will pledge my word to other men, why, pledge it; or if you would expend money, expend it. In short, I will give you, as it were, the power of attorney to do what you will so long as I may do no more than the simple assuring you that you are the most adorable of creatures."

She took, for the first time, her fan down from her mouth so that he could perceive her slight, mocking smile.

"That would be very well," she said, "if it were not that the conditions that I prescribe demand at least as much action from you as from me."

"But consider," he pleaded, "that I am a very weary man."

"Why, consider," she said, "that you must take the road to-night at midnight, and that I have some work for you to do even before then if you will."

"My ankle," Mr. Bettsworth said, "will not permit me to ride with any comfort. You are to remember that it is only to-day that for the first time I have walked without a stick."

"Friend," Lady Eshtsword said, "you are to remember that this is a matter of bargaining for my hand, against which several ankles should not be weighed in the balance. Moreover, it is a matter of fourteen days since you fell."

Mr. Bettesworth exclaimed, "Fourteen days!" with a look of extreme astonishment.

"Your Worship," Lady Eshtsford laughed, "has been so wandering amongst clouds of gloom that you have forgotten the passage of time. Nevertheless Sir Francis Dashwood has been much earlier cured of his sore wound in the shoulder, for six days ago I saw him; although he was not fit to go out of doors, he was yet well enough to drive a very hard bargain."

A spasm of jealousy contracted Mr. Bettesworth's brows.

"Why," he exclaimed, "if he is well enough to ride, so will I be; I will ride where you will and when."

"Cousin," her ladyship answered, "maybe there shall be no necessity for it, for my coach has in it two slung beds, and Maria shall not go to London, and Trott may ride in the rumble."

Mr. Bettesworth passed his hand across his brows. "If," he said, "this be a matter of winning a wager I am very well content to let it go."

"That am not I," she answered. "For, in the first place, I am not willing to take a man with a lost wager on his back, for it is the nature of men to be cowed when they have failed in the sight of all the world, and a cowed husband is not very much to my taste."

"What made you with Sir Francis 'Dashwood?" Mr. Bettesworth muttered.

"Your Worship," she said, "it was a little matter of purchase of property which, since your Worship was lost in the glooms and vapours, I employed myself upon to pass the time. Moreover, I desired to know how it fared with Sir Francis; for the time of the wager being suspended only during such time as he could not go abroad, I desired to be advised that he did not sneak into the open air and so steal a march upon the four days that remained to you."

Mr. Bettesworth felt closing round him invisible toils that he had neither the strength nor the desire to escape from.

"Madam," he said, "but this wager——"

"Moreover," she continued her own speech, "I have had Wilton House very closely watched in the interim, and I have the assurance of the Earl of Pembroke, who is our good friend, that Sir Francis has not set foot out of doors until this morning; thus, by the terms of the wager, from midnight you have ninety-six hours to win it in."

"Cousin," Mr. Bettesworth said, and for the first time he smiled, "is there any stone that you have left unturned?"

"Very few," she answered. "So that if you will marry me within the half-hour, and Mr. Williams is very ready to perform this formality, I do not see why my coach should not be stored, a sufficiency of clothes in our trunks, and the servants ready to take the road by midnight."

Mr. Bettesworth exclaimed, "In half an hour!"

A look of incredulity appeared upon his face, but he remembered himself sufficiently to clasp his hands in rapture.

"Why," she said, "the marriage should come before the preparations for the journey; and if we must travel together it is better that, as against evil tongues, we should be first married. That you should go to London alone I am very unwilling, for how should you find Ce'ia there if I be not there to guide you? and, in short——"

"Polly," he interrupted her, "what could I have to urge against it?"

"My friend," Lady Eshetsford said, "this appears to me hardly so much the moment of romantic heroics. More by token that the less we indulge in them now the more there shall remain for the time to come which is always good. But the point that I would ascertain of you is whether a marriage by this Mr. Williams should be a good marriage, for though I do not at all think you would trick me, yet very much attaches to it, and if there is any doubt it would be better to send to the parsonage, though I understand that Parson Blore is usually drunk at this hour?"

Mr. Bettsworth wrinkled his brows. "Why," he said, "I think that of that there can be no doubt, for Mr. Williams is in Holy Orders; and, for the matter of that, I have seen his papers; and although the doctrines which he had may hereafter prove heretical, yet until parsons and the like are unfrocked such marriages as they make are marriages. For the principle of the law of England as regards the estate of wedlock——"

"Your Worship," Lady Eshetsford said, "then be it Mr. Williams."

She approached the little picture by 'Pompeo' Gibboni, that stood upon the easel behind the candle, and having removed it she set it carefully into the recess of Mr. Bettesworth's chair; then she set the legs of the easel wider apart, doing it in an engrossed manner that checked any questions upon his lips.

"If you will wait here," she said, "for so long as to give Mr. Williams time to put on a cassock which he has borrowed from Parson Blore, I will be with you again."

She was away for a full twenty minutes, during all which Mr. Bettesworth sat motionless before the fire. He snuffed the candles once, but otherwise he might as well have been carved out of wax. He felt singularly little of elation; but, upon the other hand, along with the sense of entire tranquillity he had that of presenting to the world an extremely fine figure. He seemed, in fact, to himself to be almost, as perfect, to be almost as semi-divine as he had ever dreamed of being; at the same time it was as if his heart had forgotten to beat, and he had no desire to make any motions of his limbs at all. He was, in short, Mr. Bettesworth, and that was all there was to it.

He was aware at last that in the gloom next the door Lady Eshetsford was leading in a square white object. A little later he perceived that this moved upon the two legs of Mr. Williams. Lady Eshetsford was carrying the clergyman's large Prayer-book, and she had him by the elbows to direct him, since his

face and the greater part of his body were hidden by his burden. Mr. Bettesworth understood nothing, nor did he make any effort to understand. He imagined that her ladyship might have been leading in some sort of portable altar, something connected with the Church, of which he knew little and cared less. They passed indeed very close to him, so that he had to step a little on one side. At last, under the guidance of Lady Eshetsford, Mr. Williams set down his unwieldy burden upon the easel that had held the Pompeo; Mr. Bettesworth perceived that obviously it was a picture covered by a white cloth. This caused him a minute dissatisfaction, for he had been accustomed to regard the "Rape of Ganymede" as his choicest cabinet picture. Moreover, Mr. Williams' face was exceedingly flushed, and his band was to one side, matters which appeared to Mr. Bettesworth to be wanting in formality and respect; whilst upon the skirt of his own coat, at the moment when he was to say "I will," he observed four specks of snuff; these he considered must have been left there by the Signora Poppæa, who, he remembered, had taken snuff twice whilst she had been with him that evening.

The candles shone, the flames on the hearth rustled, Mr. Williams read the marriage service, but because he was very shortsighted, and he had lost his spectacles during their Odyssey, his nose travelled along the lines of his Prayer-book and they heard almost none of his words. Lady Eshetsford stood with the negligent inattention that it was proper to bestow upon parsons; and when, having finished the service, Mr. Williams erected his head, and with

a fanatic lustre beginning to illuminate his black eyes, said that the present was an opportunity upon which he might well indulge himself with a few words, Lady Eshetsford took him up sharply.

"Mr. Williams," she said, "these doctrines may be very well for the lower orders, and I make no doubt that they are—nay, I wish you every prosperity—but we have very little time to waste, and we are persons of good conscience and well assured of our own minds; preaching to us would make us no better nor worse."

Mr. Williams looked with an affecting timidity at the face of Mr. Bettesworth. "Oh, Mr. Williams, you need not doubt that Mr. Bettesworth in all that is proper will perform his promises to you; nay, he has every reason to regard you with gratitude, and I for him. So that if I should find him inclined to be remiss in them I would myself hold him to it, but you must see that where matters of importance are on foot such things as orthodoxy and heterodoxy must stand aside. Nevertheless, as a token of the favour that I hold you in I will give you the privilege that I would grant to but few other men, since it is hardly fitting that you should take that of being the first to kiss the bride, which most country parsons claim, but I will allow you to unveil for me that picture upon the easel!"

To remove the draperies upon the picture Mr. Williams must go behind the easel, so that for the time he disappeared. At his operations the cloths appeared slowly to 'unsettle themselves, there ap-

peared the shoulder of the gilded frame ; the edge of the cloth seemed to crawl along by inches, then suddenly it dropped all down.

Mr. Bettesworth's body inclined itself forward ; in spite of him his two hands came up in an attitude of discovery. A maiden was sitting at the foot of a tree ; her dress was of greyish-white sprigged with pink silk in lines ; a great hat hung from her left arm by a broad pink ribbon. At her feet lay a little frail in the shape of a cream-jug ; all round her was massed brownish foliage of the colour of soup ; and upon her figure fell, from nowhere in particular, a single ray of light. Beneath the picture the candles threw their light upwards, and as they still waved in the draught of air made by the fall of the cloth the figure wavered and appeared alive.

Mr. Bettesworth's jaw remained hanging down, his eyebrows arched themselves into an entire incredulity. Mr. Williams emerged from behind the easel and looked up at the picture mystically, whilst he bent down to pick up from the floor the fallen white cloths.

"This picture, Mr. Williams," Lady Eshetsford said, "is the famous one of 'Celia in her Arbour,' which Sir Francis Dashwood was gallant enough to sell to me six days ago."

Mr. Williams straightened himself, the cloths trailing from his hand.

"Madam," he said, "'tis a very excellent portrait of your ladyship ; yet I wonder that the great of this world have so much time to bestow upon vanities thus idle."

"Mr. Williams," Lady Eshetsford said, "if you will write your very excellent lessons down in a book you may set me down at the head of your list of subscribers, but in the meantime, whilst giving you all my thanks, I beg that you will carry these cloths to Mrs. Jakins the housekeeper."

Mr. Bettsworth recoiled a full three paces from his wife.

"So that you," he said, "are Celia?"

"Why," she answered, "is it then so great a disappointment that your fine eyes have not captivated a Celia that is another."

"But if I have not done that," Mr. Bettsworth said, "then I have achieved nothing, for sure it was only because there seemed to be another Celia who was ready to surrender to me, that either by good fortune or by my proper parts I should have made a conquest and achieved a victory."

"Nevertheless," Lady Eshetsford said, "you will be the most heroical figure in London in four days' time, for will you not have found, fetched, housed, wedded, and led to a dinner of the Dilettante Society, Celia who has come out of her arbour? Sure you will be the talk of the Town, and may for nine days or so hold your head higher in every assembly than the victor of Ramillies."

"But I," Mr. Bettsworth insisted; "you have played with me as if I were a fish upon a hair-line, and here I am."

"Oh, my friend," Lady Eshetsford said, "take your laurels and wear them, and do not inquire too closely what hand holds the knife that cut

them, for I think most great victories are like this, and most great victors, if you could search their hearts are much as you are: for it is nine parts fortune and one of merit, and so the world goes on."

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